POLITICAL BOOK AWARD ISSUE

The Washington Monthly

MARCH 1991/$3.50

- The Senate's lame doves: Why they failed to stop the war
- James Fallows on social class
- Gregg Easterbrook on science literacy

GENERAL FAILURE:

What the Press Doesn't Tell You About America's Military Leaders

by Scott Shuger

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NATURE'S SPLENDID STONES HAVE A MYSTICAL POWER TO ATTRACT US.

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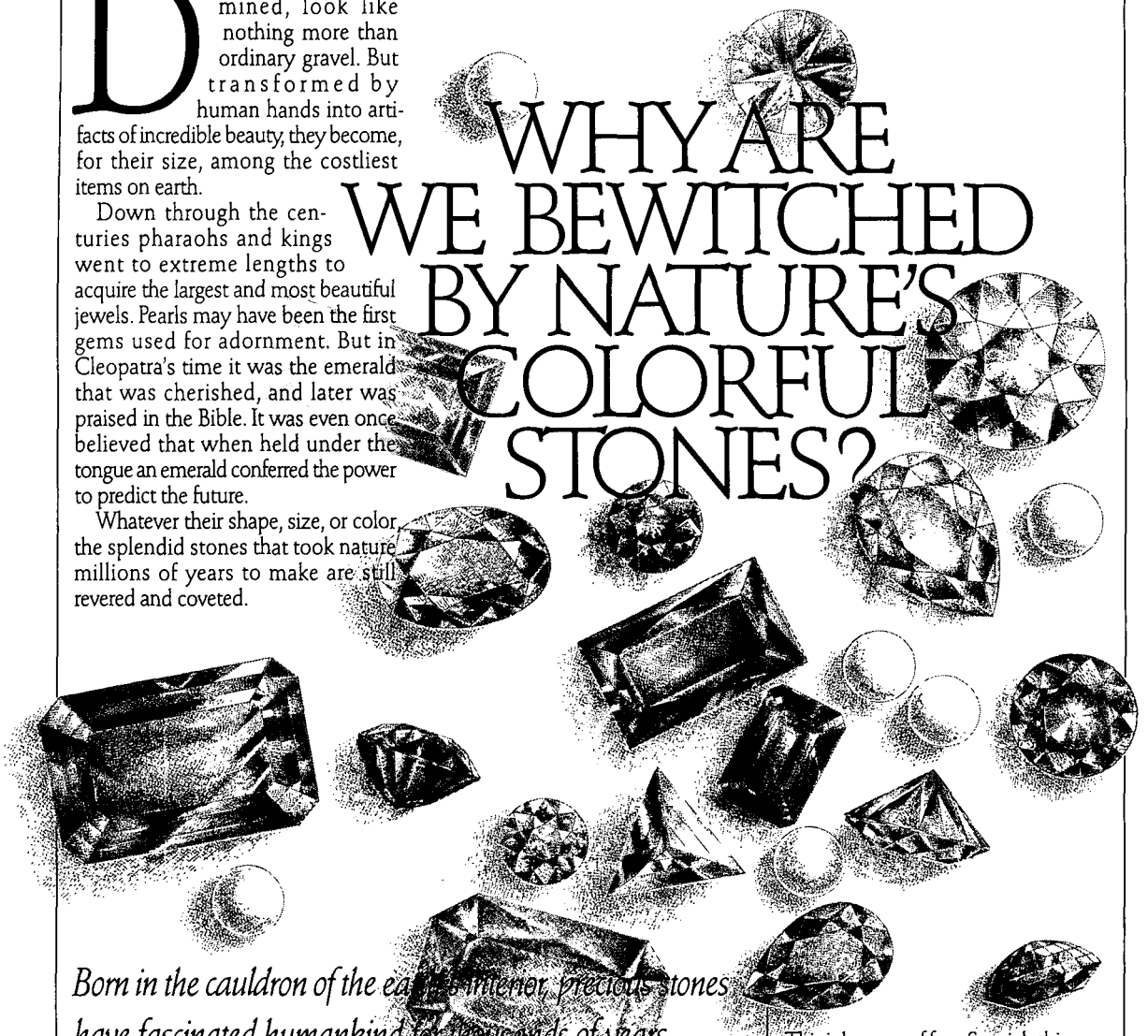

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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-Three, Number 3 March 1991

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LETTERS

*Mess*opotamia

Congratulations on "How They Missed That Story," [James Bennet, December] about the failure of modern "press release journalism" to look into the reasons for the military buildup of Operation Desert Shield.

However, you overlooked an even more ominous eventuality. What happens if the U.S. wins? There's an old Arabic saying that it is better to be a cock for a day than a chicken for a year. On that basis, the U.S. response has built Saddam Hussein into an Islamic superhero.

Now, pick whatever victory scenario you like, then ask, "What happens after we win?" Consider it on all bases: religious, military, economic, cultural, and geographic. By comparison, it will make the skill of Prince Klemens von Metternich at the Congress of Vienna seem like the resolution of a kindergarten sandbox dispute.

TED RUSHTON
Phoenix, Arizona

James Bennet quotes a *Los Angeles Times* piece of August 5 which has since been heavily reinforced by Congressional testimony: "Any plan for using U.S. troops on the ground in . . . Iraq chills military experts."

In the 4th century A.D. the Roman Emperor Julian, himself a gifted general, wrote satirically of an imaginary meeting between Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. "Why is it," Alexander scoffed, "that in 300 years of effort your Romans have been unable to subdue the single province of Mesopotamia [Iraq]?"

Later, Julian ignored not only history but irony and invaded Iraq himself, where he was destroyed. Perhaps our military advisers are adding to their consideration of the pitfalls of modern warfare a memory of the bloody age-old trap that waits in "the land between the rivers."

COLIN G. JAMESON
Key West, Florida

Government by degree

I didn't think the economy was in such terrible shape until I read Mr. Heilemann's sad story ["Uncle Sam Doesn't Want You," December] about the plight of recent Ivy League grads. I can just imagine the psychological scars left on these poor rejected souls after spending a day at the Office of Personnel Management.

I expect a dinner conversation at one brutally treated supplicant's summer home to have gone something like this:

MUM: Skipper, I can't believe it! They wouldn't give you that measly GS-15 undersecretary position at Education? Didn't they realize that you're *Ivy League*?

SKIPPER: It's no use Mum, the government has been taken over by city university night school types. They even made me stand in line and fill out forms!

PATER: My Gawd, what have we become when a 23-year-old with 1400 SATs and an Ivy League education can't get a top job in government? This would never have happened in England. They have a proper civil service. What's Peters's number down at TWM? He needs to be informed.

MUM: Good idea, dear. Look how TWM helped Bunny! Imagine, they wanted her to have a credential to teach. Don't they know she graduated from Brown?

Why does the image of a patronizing, supercilious, Ivy League pontificator come to mind when I try to picture the person who wrote this article? Must be SAT envy.

JIM MORGAN
Yuba City, California

Your article on government employment hit a painful nail on the head.

PAUL A. VOLCKER
New York, New York

Mr. Volcker was the chairman of the National Commission on Public Service.

I hope John Heilemann's excellent article on government recruiting (or lack thereof) inspires the folks at OPM to get their act together and come up with a more responsive hiring system. I've been a seasonal ranger with the National Park Service for 20 years and can testify that the application process gives new depth to the word byzantine.

I disagree, though, with the author's contention that meager government salaries are not part of the problem. The Park Service has never had a problem presenting a "sexy" image and, until recently, attracting large numbers of applicants. It is common to find rangers with 10 years in the Park Service, a college degree, and thousands of hours of formal training who are still being paid at the GS-5 or -7 level. As a result, many parks are having difficulty finding qualified seasonal workers and permanent rangers are leaving in increasing numbers.

The dedication to an ideal found among park rangers is probably as high as it is among Peace Corps workers, so if we're in trouble, imagine what the rest of the federal system is like.

GEORGE DURKEE
Twain Harte, California

Bagged

I am sure you and Leonard Reed ["Tilting At Windmills," December] are able to speak with authority when disparaging GS-15s, but your snide comparison of their competence with Safeway managers is both a cheap and uninformed shot. Not only are Safeway managers' jobs demanding and complex, they are responsible for making a profit—something not just alien to, but looked down upon, by many bureaucrats.

BILL SCHNIRRING
New York, New York

The editor replies:

I respect all honest work and do not intend to demean anyone when I say some jobs are worth less than $81,000.

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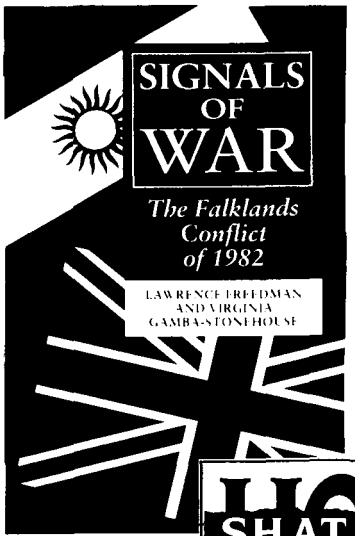
History and Politics



The 1982 Falklands War was one of the most extraordinary military confrontations of recent years. This unusual book makes it possible to follow the development of the war from both sides, as two leading experts from the belligerents present an integrated, authoritative, and engrossing account of its origins and course.

"*Signals of War* will stand as *the* authoritative work on the Falklands war. It is also a wonderful read, a gripping political-military history."—*Richard Ullman*

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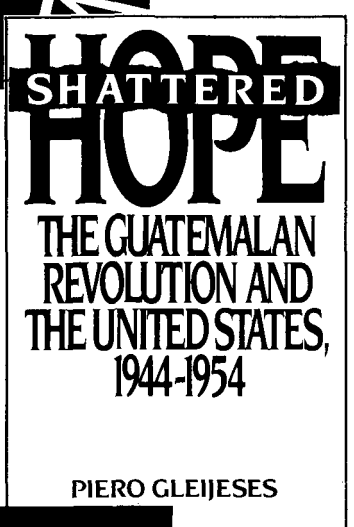

This stirring narrative is the most thorough account yet available of a revolution that saw the first true agrarian reform in Central America. It is also a penetrating analysis of the tragic destruction of that revolution. In no other Central American country was U.S. intervention so decisive and so ruinous, charges Piero Gleijeses.

"With a sure command of fresh materials that give him insight into the Guatemalan side as well as into U.S. foreign policy, Piero Gleijeses has written an indispensable analysis of this once-promising and now tragic—and most instructive—event in U.S.–Latin American relations."
—*Walter LaFeber*

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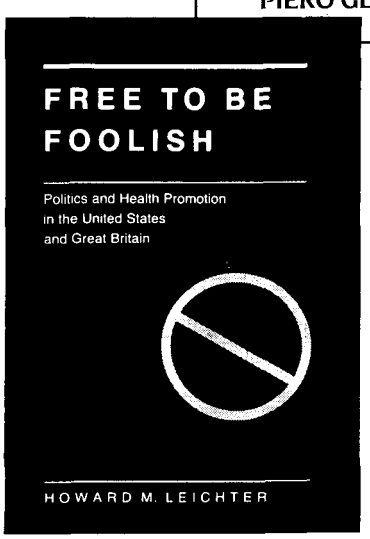

Each of us is, to a certain extent, dangerous to his or her own health, but how far do we want the government to curb our freedom to be "foolish"? In a look at such highly charged health issues as smoking, alcohol, road safety, and AIDS, Howard Leichter analyzes the efforts of the United States and Great Britain to confront the seemingly constant tension involved with this question.

". . . the tension between personal liberty and health status, itself so weighty, is treated with. . . elegance, not heavy-handedness."—*Theodore R. Marmor*

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So the snideness you perceived was totally inadvertent and is regretted.

Fan letter carrier

I am a letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service, a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers, and a union steward here in Columbus. I intended to receive one issue of your magazine and then say "thanks but no thanks." However, I must confess that, for the time being, I am addicted to *The Washington Monthly*. I don't agree with everything within its pages, but it educates me and makes me think. Who could ask for anything more? Keep up the good work.

DANNY BURTON
Columbus, Ohio

Uncivil service

I read with profound interest and frustration your article entitled "How Bureaucrats Pad Their Pensions," condensed by *Readers' Digest* in its October issue ["A Pension for Trouble," Matthew Cooper, July/August 1989]. However, the fat cats don't exist in all levels of civil service.

My late husband took early retirement at age 58 after 28 years of government service, including his naval wartime service. He was a GS-13 with his last employer, HUD. One would have thought that with 28 years of service, he would have been able to receive at least $17,000 per year in benefits. Instead, he got $12,500 combined with social security—and much of that was taken away from me when he died in 1989.

It's really sad when our president finds so much time to entertain Michael Jackson at the White House and follow all sports events and telephone all the winners, but doesn't think it's important to answer a widow's letter asking for a waiver to reinstate a partial annuity. I'm a registered Republican, but I won't cast my vote again. The "devil made me do it."

RUTH MORGAN
Breckenridge, Texas

Great balls of ire

I read with amusement your "Memo of the Month" for January/February 1991. My amusement was not because the "mouseballs" memo in itself was funny, but rather because it is a total fabrication. I work as a consultant in the computer industry, and that memo has been circulating "in the business" for about one and a half years. It was originally generated by a manager at IBM's Boca Raton, Florida, division as a joke, and was mistakenly allowed to leave the company. I've heard through the grapevine that the person who generated the memo is mightily perturbed that his "inside" joke has received so much attention.

ROBERT J. SYPEK
Hudson, Massachusetts

The editor replies:

Because "Memo of the Month" aims to delve into the unconscious mind of the bureaucrat, over the years we have tried to weed out memos that are concocted to be funny. Apparently, last month we missed one. So, please do not send us memo candidates that you believe were *designed* to be amusing.

The Washington Monthly

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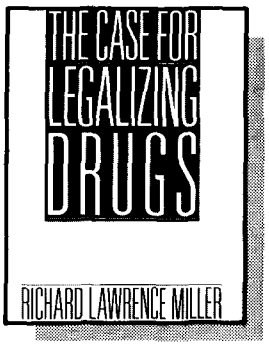

The Case for Legalizing Drugs
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". . . the single most important book yet written about illegal drugs and the drug war. It's historically informed, thoroughly documented, and brilliantly argued. The U.S. Treasury is being raided and American citizens are incarcerated and dying for lack of the knowledgeable realism Richard Lawrence Miller advocates in this authoritative, compassionate book."

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William Mitchell,
University of Oregon

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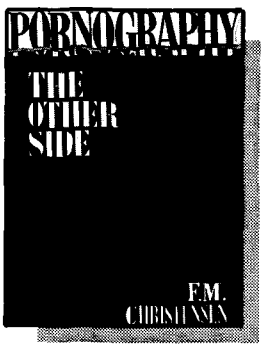

Pornography
The Other Side
By F. M. Christensen

". . . a unique and important book. I have never read any work which analyzes the subject in such a manner. This book is more thorough and has a more liberated point of view than others which attempt to tackle this 'hot potato' of the 1980s. Men should read this book. Women should read this book."

Karen DeCrow,
former President, NOW

"This study slices like a laser through the fog of rhetoric, misinformation, bias and fear that has long enveloped all discussions of the subject of pornography in the U.S. No argument in favor of the censorship of such material can be considered valid unless the basic arguments of this study are answered."

Choice

208 pages. 0-275-93537-X. $19.95.

Visionary Capitalism
Financial Markets and the American Dream in the Twentieth Century
By Charles R. Geisst

Arguing that the ideal of an American Dream finds its best tangible expression in the ways in which the financial markets have been used to foster and protect the ideals of quality housing, higher education, and agricultural production, the author analyzes the successes and failures of the markets in producing a high standard of living and well-being over the past 70 years.

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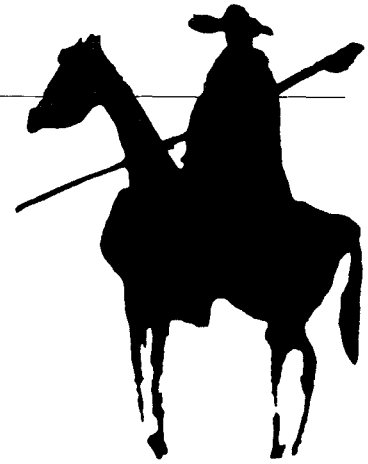
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



Recall how the oil spill dominated the news the weekend of January 26-27? Again and again we saw that tape of a poor bird desperately struggling to climb ashore. On Monday the 28th, if you were listening closely, you may have heard the announcer say that the big spill had not yet reached the Saudi coast and acknowledge *sotto voce* that the oil from which the bird had been trying to emerge was not the result of the intentional leak, but came from an earlier one that was probably an accidental byproduct of Iraqi shelling on the first day of the war. It seems to me that Saddam Hussein does enough real evil that it is silly for our propagandists to feel compelled to fake evidence of his sins. . . .

Isn't there a bit of a danger that we might earn a reputation as the world's bully from the opponents that the United States (pop. 249,000,000) has been choosing to start wars with in the past decade: Grenada (pop. 87,000), Panama (pop. 2,370,000), and Iraq (pop. 17,610,000)? Somehow we have lost our sense of proportion. It just doesn't make sense to use our military might to devastate a small country when all we really want to do is punish one man. . . .

The mindlessness of television news has never troubled me more than during the crisis in the Gulf. Intelligent antiwar arguments, seldom presented before the war, have virtually disappeared since actual hostilities commenced on January 16. The world is split, in the language of the anchors, into those who "support our troops" and "antiwar protesters." The protesters who get air time tend to be those who are sufficiently deranged to burn the flag or, even more incredibly, to riot in the Senate gallery during a speech *against* the war. Rarely is a thoughtful opponent of the war given a chance to say that the best way to support our troops is to save their lives.

I must admit, however, that a fatal concession was made by Senator Sam Nunn that helps explain the oversimplified distinction between supporting the troops and being against the war. In the midst of his eloquent and persuasive speech on the Senate floor on January 11 against going to war, Nunn interjected a comment that the antiwar side was probably going to lose the vote in Congress and that if it did, he would support the president in the war that would come. He should not have announced his surrender in advance. In fact, he should not have surrendered at all. If the war was a bad idea on January 11, it's still a bad idea today.

To be sure, every step we have taken since the sensible embargo has made it more embarrassing to admit those steps were wrong and return to the embargo. But if the killing is still going on, surely stopping it is worth a lot of embarrassment. And the embargo, if we continue to strongly enforce it, will still render Saddam Hussein impotent in the long run. . . .

As financial troubles and a desire for increased efficiency dictate reductions in public bureaucracies, it is important that we refuse to accept seniority as the basis for deciding which employees will be retained. The idiotic result such a policy can produce was illustrated last month in Minnesota when Cathy Nelson, the state's Teacher of the Year, was laid off. Because there are too few really good teachers or really good bureaucrats, the country simply can't afford the luxury of firing them to protect their seniors who have less ability. . . .

Federal employees are up in arms about a prohibition of moonlighting in the Ethics Reform Act. The prohibition is a bit excessive, but that it is aimed at a real problem is made clear by the letter a civil servant wrote to Mike Causey of *The Washington Post*:

"In my agency so many grade 14 and 15 types teach at the local college there is never any

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audiovisual equipment or supplies for our training. Movie projectors, slide and overhead projectors, etc., are either at the college or [in] the trunk[s] of the moonlighting teachers' cars. Photocopying machines are in almost constant use cranking out course outlines, notes, exams, and the like."

A second problem, illustrated by another civil servant's letter, might be called "daylighting":

"I work in an office where half the people are engaged in other things while supposedly working for the government. A couple sell household cleaning products to coworkers (which is an imposition and time consuming) and also sell to outsiders by phone.

"The biggest abusers are those who sell real estate from the office. Some of them spend half their time working on nonfederal jobs. I would go to the boss, but he (and his wife) have a sideline too."

The real estate sales abuse is so common throughout the federal government, according to Scott Shuger's article on bureaucracy in our June 1990 issue, that the current real estate slump could only be a boon to good government: Finally, the daylighters will have time to do their real jobs.

If you need further reassurance about how your tax dollars are being spent, I urge you to contemplate the fact that there are five state and local employees for every federal worker and then consider this example from a *Boston Globe* report about daylighting among state court employees: "Joseph Szulewski, 48, who earns $31,000 a year as a court officer, runs a small, family-owned funeral home in Cambridge—sometimes on courthouse time.

"So far this year, there were 25 weekdays during which Szulewski's business conducted a daytime wake or burial, services that Szulewski routinely handles himself.

"But on 21 of these days, he was officially noted as working a full day in the courthouse." . . .

My hunch is that in years to come congressional Democrats will look back on the past year with great pride at two stands that they took, the first in favor of making the rich begin to pay their fair share of taxes and the second in support of sanctions against the war. Their regret will be that they should have taken both stands earlier and fought harder on behalf of their convictions. . . .

Speaking of our dedicated leaders, where do you think 10 members of the House were caught at war's outbreak? At the front with our troops in the desert? Not quite. They *were* in the desert, but at an oasis, a.k.a. Palm Springs, California, where their sun, fun, and honoraria were being paid for by that great servant of the public interest, the Tobacco Institute. . . .

Speaking of oases, have you noticed the hardship posts from which most of the American press—God bless the brave exceptions like Bob Simon—is reporting the war in the Gulf? They are staying at luxury hotels like the five-star Dhahran International, at which the pool side area where the TV cameras are set up is called "Little Hollywood," and those blue domes you see in the background are not mosques, but cabanas. . . .

A couple of interesting facts I hadn't known emerged from Senator Ernest Hollings's speech during the congressional debate. 1) The Emir of Kuwait refused to open his hospital to the badly injured sailors from the U.S.S. *Stark* after it was attacked in the Gulf a few years ago. 2) Kuwait has voted against us in the United Nations more often than the Soviet Union. . . .

One lie that the prowar forces love to repeat is that, in the words of a recent article in *The Washington Post*, "Today's enlisted recruits are broadly similar to the general youth population in terms of socio-economic characteristics." The lie begins to emerge in the article's fine print, where there is a concession that "10 percent of American youth living in the country's richest communities were about half as likely to enlist in the military as those from the poorest communities."

Of course the truth is much worse than even this concession suggests. The real standard should not be the wealth of the "community" or the "area"—there are always people of modest means living among people whose wealth is so great that it raises the local average above the national. All you have to do is consult your own experience to know that it is the people of modest means who have done the volunteering.

Just stop and think: How many rich people do you know in the military? How many graduates of Harvard and Yale? Another way of getting at the truth is, if you happen to be among the more affluent yourself, to ask if you have any relatives in the military. When *Time* magazine recently asked whites and blacks if they had family members serving in the Middle East, the percentage of blacks who replied yes was more than twice that of the whites. Still, the percentage of whites with relatives in the military was four times that of congressmen—even when the representatives' in-laws were counted.

But when George Bush is

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asked if it's right for the elite to let the rest of the country do the dying, he answers by indignantly defending the quality of the volunteer Army while carefully avoiding the issue of fairness—a debating technique reminiscent of another of our illustrious leaders, Richard M. Nixon. . . .

Have you noticed that what we have in today's Germany is a chemical-biological-pacifist complex? . . .

How do our institutions of higher learning find the funds to pay large salaries to top-heavy administrative staffs and prominent professors who teach only a few hours a week? One method, of which parents are ruefully aware, is to regularly raise tuition at about double the inflation rate. Another, which I first became aware of while appraising the training of Peace Corps volunteers by universities, is to steal from the taxpayers through the device of exorbitant "administrative" costs tacked on to contracts with the federal government for research and training programs.

I therefore was delighted to see that Stanford recently got caught gouging the government for $184,000 for depreciation of a luxury yacht the university owned, not to mention $2,500 to refurbish a grand piano, $3,000 to pay for a cedar-lined closet, and $2,000 a month to buy flowers, all for the residence of Stanford President Donald Kennedy. Since 1981, the federal government has paid a total of $500,000 for the operation of Kennedy's house and those of two other Stanford administrators. Similar thievery through clever accounting led me to conclude during my Peace Corps years that the people who used to sell you the Brooklyn Bridge are now all in academic administration. . . .

Do you remember that 10-day budget summit at Andrews Air Force Base in September? The participants were high-level administration officials and congressional leaders such as Sununu, Darman, Foley, Mitchell, and Dole. I wouldn't suggest you take these guys out to lunch. At the Andrews Officers' Club, they ran up a bill of $58,900 for just food and liquor. . . .

The Japanese executives who run Mazda recently cut their own salaries to penalize themselves for quality defects in their cars. This is the exact kind of thing American executives never seem to do—take responsibility for their own mistakes. . . .

If you are a citizen of the District of Columbia, you may have wondered why, even for the most insignificant fire, the D.C. Fire Department always dispatches two fire trucks. The reason is that, back in the old days the coal-fired engine used to power the water pump was so heavy that one team of horses couldn't carry it and the necessary hoses to a blaze, so another team was needed to carry the hoses.

Today's fire trucks can pump the water and carry the hoses. So why does the D.C. Fire Department still use two trucks? Because it takes more firemen to operate two trucks than it does to operate one. This adds up to 168 unnecessary firemen, costing the District $9.2 million a year. . . .

These facts, for which I am grateful to the Rivlin Commission, help explain why the lead story in the December 27 *Washington Post* was headlined:

"D.C. DEFICIT COULD REACH $300 MILLION, REPORT SAYS"

The story quoted an expert on municipal finances as saying:

"In my 11 years of working with governments in financial difficulty, I do not believe I have ever encountered a situation as potentially disastrous as this one . . . all the major actors in Washington have avoided their responsibility for many years."

I couldn't help thinking as I read those words how much better it would have been if the *Post* had told its readers about the incompetence of the Barry administration back in January 1984, when we first urged it to do so. An alerted citizenry might have been aroused to action in time to defeat Barry in 1986. Instead, because the *Post* did such a poor job of letting the people know, even someone as thoughtful and generally well-informed as Alice Rivlin could express polite disbelief as recently as the spring of 1990, when in the course of a lunch shortly after she had taken charge of the commission that was to bear her name, I told her that *The Washington Monthly* regarded the District city hall as a leading contender for the title of Worst City Government in America . . . .

The next great historic failure of the *Post* is going to be its coverage of the build-up to the war in the Gulf. In a story that reminds me so much of the paper's timely reporting on the Barry administration, *Post* reporters Ann Devroy and Dan Balz informed us *after* Bush had attacked Iraq that he had intended to go to war since August, a fact that Ben Bradlee had presumably decided was *not* news until after it was too late for the rest of us to do anything. The *Post*'s embargo on Bush's intentions to go to war was so firm that, even when the very reliable Jack Nelson of the *Los Angeles Times* reported on December 28, about three weeks

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before the *Post* article, that "President Bush . . . has decided that the United States should move quickly to launch a massive military attack on Iraqi forces, " not a word of his story appeared in *The Washington Post*. . . .

Remember when adults used to gather at the local YMCA to talk about how to help the needy youth of the community? Wonder what they're doing these days? Well, the latest course to be offered at the National Capital YMCA is "Investment Positioning in the Nineties" . . . .

"U.S. Does Favor for Key Ally" read the headline over a story describing how, at the urging of the State Department, the Turkish government was being permitted to tear down its chancery on historic Embassy Row, even though preservationist groups had united in opposing the demolition. This tiny example of how the Gulf war has distorted our foreign policy is of little significance. The only cost will be an eyesore instead of a charming building. But there are other important examples that have truly evil consequences: We have deserted the brave students of Tiananmen Square in order to get the Chinese to side with us in the UN, and we have embraced a Syrian dictator who helped kill our Marines in Beirut and whose record on human rights abuse is no better than Saddam Hussein's. The Chinese students who are being tried and sent to jail now are especially troubling. I doubt that this would be happening if the world spotlight was on China instead of the Gulf. . . .

One of the original purposes of *The Washington Monthly* was to increase the bureaucratic sophistication of the American press, which in 1968 was just about zero. We have made some progress, but it is clear we still have a long way to go. Consider that it took the Pentagon press corps a week to wake up to the way they were being conned by that 80 percent success rate of air missions in the Gulf. They even failed to listen when Colin Powell gave away the key to the hustle on the first day by explaining that the rate was based on "arriving at the target and delivering the ordnance." There is, of course, no mention of the ordnance hitting the target. . . .

In 1986, according to a report by the Department of Interior's inspector general, the same group of farmers received $66 million from the Bureau of Reclamations and $379 million from the Department of Agriculture. What was wrong with that? The $66 million was to pay them to irrigate

Here's a glimmer of hope in the war against crime.

In cities ranging from Los Angeles to Baltimore to Newport News, innovative police chiefs are adopting bold new strategies resulting not only in better crime control but also a better quality of life. Here's a report from the front and a blueprint for action.

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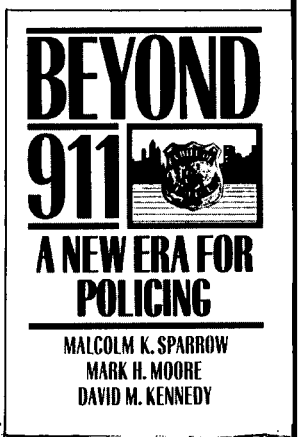

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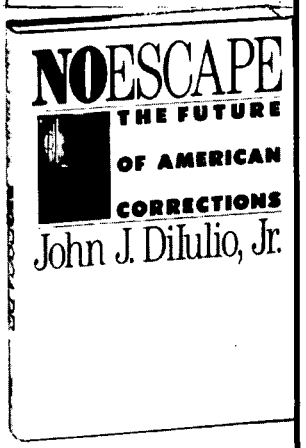

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land that produced surplus crops. The $379 million was to limit surplus crops. . . .

Mark Bisnow's excellent examination of the folkways of Capitol Hill, *In the Shadow of the Dome,* makes an interesting point about how congressmen differ from presidents. Bold positions in foreign affairs, much valued as a way of appearing decisive and statesmanlike by occupants of the White House, are viewed with anxiety by congressmen who fear the voters will think they are spending more time on Uganda than on the problems in the home district. The experience of J. William Fulbright and Charles Percy, both of whom had been chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is cited by anxious legislators who want to avoid the electoral disaster that overtook those senators when the voters became convinced that they were too enamored of the exotica of foreign affairs.

Bisnow, a former congressional staff member, is candid about the lures of seeing the world to those who work on the Hill. Did you know that congressional travel groups (designated as CODELs by the State Department) include not only members of the House and the Senate, their staffs, and spouses, but if a spouse is not going, other relatives of the members such as mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters! And did you know that while the use of government aircraft requires a initial commitment of 10 members to go on the trip, these commitments can be canceled before the trip; so in effect, they are simply friendly gestures to one or two members who actually want to go with their entourages of staff and family? And did you know that at each stop, the State Department arranges entertainment and sightseeing and provides a "control room" to provide local currency and alcoholic refreshment "around the clock"? And did you know that airborne accommodations included "a first-class seating configuration and the presence of military stewards, who cooked fresh meals, incongruously billing the passengers for the cost of the ingredients—the only unreimbursed expense of the trip"? . . .

Since I was a child, I have had a strong tendency to sentimentalize the virtues of the Anglo-American character. I was 13 at the time of the Battle of Britain, and it remains to me the crucial moment in the history of the century. When I was 17, Franklin Roosevelt's call for a world police force made me an even more ardent advocate for a fourth term. There are no words that resonate more powerfully in my soul than the line from an old Protestant hymn, "Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there."

So you can see I'm not kidding when I say I have some idea of where George Bush is coming from. I, too, want a new and just world order. I, too, feel we have a moral duty to try to attain it.

But where we differ is that I don't think we can afford the money, or more importantly, the blood, to use war to bring about that good world by ourselves. Bush had the right idea in his grasp, the international embargo which would have killed no one while uniting the world in an effective response to Iraq's aggression. But he yielded to his psychological weakness, his fear of wimpdom, and his practical political need to extricate himself from the budget debacle. I believe that consciously or unconsciously, he decided that the appearance of decisiveness in foreign affairs would regain his popularity. As indeed it did. *Time* magazine proclaimed him the Man of the Year, saying that in foreign affairs he has risen "from competence to mastery." . . .

As Bush began to have to justify to himself and the world the deaths war would cause, he hit upon the moral argument that he began to emphasize during the last week of January. Because it touched something real in his soul, it produced the most powerful oratory of his presidency. One could not escape feeling that this man was sincere.

But sincerity, alas, is not enough to excuse his error. It is an error which is rooted in two less happy characteristics of the WASP—a tendency to deal too harshly or, less often, too indulgently, with the frailties of those whose skin is not lily-white and a tendency to think "we know best" in affairs involving such people—a tendency to which there is a related assumption that we should be the main if not the sole policeman on the world beat.

While I fervently hope that the war will have ended by the time you read these words, I am confident that, even though it may have been relatively short, history will judge it severely. As the months and years go by, the families of those who died on both sides will realize that their sons and daughters would still be alive if Bush had had the resolve to stick to the embargo. The resulting legacy of hatred will be with us for generations to come and George Bush's adventure in the Gulf will be remembered not as the enduring triumph of a Winston Churchill in 1940, but as the miserable mistake of an Anthony Eden at Suez. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

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General Failure

What the press doesn't tell you about America's military leaders

by Scott Shuger

Like everybody else, I started out the Persian Gulf war head-over-hardware, riveted by direct hit videos, awash in bomb damage assessments, living from one Scud alert to the next. When I wasn't watching Anthony Cordesman wax wondrous over Tomahawk missiles, it's because I had switched to Wolf Blitzer waxing wondrous over Patriot missiles. It got to the point where the hold-up in the line at the Safeway was a heated discussion between two check out clerks about the maximum effective range of a laser-guided bomb.

But gradually it dawned on me that something was missing in all this. Something very central to national defense that is now getting only the feeblest of attention, something that before war was imminent got virtually none at all. Here's a quick fill-in-the-blank quiz: At the height of World War II, General Eisenhower referred to _____ as "indispensable to the war effort, one of the guarantors of our victory." He was speaking of:

a) the B-17 bomber
b) the Sherman tank
c) the P-51 fighter

The answer is "none of the above"—Ike was talking about General George Patton. A country that's now thoroughly obsessed with weapons has forgotten that an essential component of success in war is *generalship* (and admiralship). A crafty general is the ultimate smart weapon, and a dull-witted one makes for the biggest possible dud. We've been helped to this state of amnesia by a press that simply makes no real effort to evaluate military commanders by name. Sadly, this is true even of the minority of journalists who cover national defense with reform in mind. You could have read every page of an excellent issue of *The Atlantic* (June 1989) given over mostly to articles on how to fix the Pentagon, without

Scott Shuger is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Research assistance was provided by Elliott Beard, John Gould, and Joshua Ray Levin.*

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picking up the faintest clue about our generals—about how they think about the next war or about what they've done in their commands to win it. Instead, all the while the next war was becoming this war, the press put its focus on metal and overlooked mettle.

Suppose there's enough of a lull in the fighting to allow tomorrow's papers to squeeze in the following story:

> WASHINGTON—The Pentagon announced today that it deplored the unauthorized disclosure of information about the highly classified B-3 bomber in yesterday's editions of *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Although a senior defense official would not deny the substance of the newspapers' stories, he did announce that "strong corrective measures" would be taken. And within an hour, after consulting with President Bush and other Pentagon officials, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney announced that because the revelations were "contrary to sound practice" and "inappropriate," he was immediately canceling the airplane.

Maybe it'll be an especially slow day and they'll be able to get this one in too:

> WASHINGTON—There was a flurry of activity at the Department of Defense today in the wake of yesterday's surprising news that the much ballyhooed M-2 battle tank is considerably slower and has less firepower than the Pentagon had expected. Attempting to limit any political damage, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams said that Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney would not draw any conclusions about American military readiness from this development, and that no consideration has been given to canceling the M-2.

Absurd, you say? Episodes like these could never happen? Well, actually, with one minor change each, they *did* happen. For the minor change, think of the B-3 as the "Dugan" bomber and the M-2 as the "Waller" tank. Last fall, Secretary of Defense Cheney fired the Air Force's top officer, General Michael Dugan, within hours after *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* published remarks by Dugan about the Pentagon's plans in case of war with Iraq. The quotes attributed to Cheney in the B-3 story above were actually said by him in connection with Dugan. On the other hand, firing wasn't even discussed last December when the deputy commander of Desert Shield, Lt. General Calvin Waller, told reporters that U.S. forces in the Gulf would "not be ready for combat activities" by January 15th, the date that signified the possible beginning of military action against Iraq. The Williams statement about Cheney in the M-2 story above was actually said by him in connection with Waller.

In other words, what strikes us as absurd in the case of weapons readily passes muster in the case of generals. This means that America doesn't understand a fundamental military fact: *Generals are weapons too*. And like any other weapon, they should be evaluated for what they would bring to a war effort.

The Dugan and Waller cases make it clear that not even the best of the press has taken this task of evaluation seriously enough. In its editorial on Dugan's firing, *The New York Times* said Cheney was right to sack the general primarily because of his remark that when it came to picking Iraqi targets, he didn't "expect to be concerned" about political constraints. The *Times*'s R. W. Apple observed that Dugan had "few defenders . . . at the Pentagon or elsewhere in Washington," and explained that what cost him his job was that he "was unguarded, speaking on the record . . . at a moment when the situation was delicately poised." *The Washington Post* called the firing a "courageous" act required because Dugan's "gross threats" left an impression of an administration anxious to go to war. Richard Cohen, in his *Post* column, declared that Dugan deserved to get sacked because he lacked "decorum." The *Los Angeles Times*'s John Broder—one of the reporters to whom Dugan gave his ill-starred interview—reasoned that Dugan "had forced Cheney and other administration officials to respond" because the general had "squandered the precious quantity of 'deniability'." Broder's paper took the editorial stance that although the firing was "worrisome," it was also "inevitable."

What was missing from the coverage was any sense that there are some important things that generals do besides dealing with the press. (A mistake the Pentagon itself encourages. All those Desert Storm briefings make it clear that you don't get serious stars without mastering the art of the information-free press conference.) So, finding fault with Dugan's press performance, the press jumped straight to the conclusion that he had to go.

If some attention had been paid to a rather well-known historical episode, there could have been a more sophisticated discussion. Within one week in the late summer of 1943, at a time when General George Patton was making dramatic breakthroughs against the Germans in Sicily, the hotheaded general twice struck soldiers suffering from combat fatigue. The incidents came to the attention of Eisenhower and top officials in Washington, including President Roosevelt, and eventually led to an outcry among the general public when it was leaked by Drew Pearson. Although Patton's actions were recognized to be inexcusable by his superiors, he wasn't kicked out of the Army or relieved of his command. Instead, he was reprimanded by Eisenhower and required to apologize to the men he hit and witnesses. After the

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successful conclusion of his Sicily campaign, Patton was transferred to England, where he was made to cool his heels (while at the same time put at the head of a phony invasion army that was used quite effectively to divert the German defenses away from the real invasion's target, Normandy). That's where Patton remained until his skills were needed again in the field. He responded by scorching across France and Germany. Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who had risked his own standing to approve all these arrangements, later wrote, "Perhaps no decision of the war was more triumphantly vindicated by events than this one."

What is remarkable about the press's handling of the Dugan case is not that no one in the media defended Dugan, but that *no one asked if he was a good general and if it was a good idea to fire a good general for the mistakes Dugan made.* It occurred to no one to wonder about the wisdom of firing the top air planner in the midst of preparing the largest U.S. air operation since World War II for actions that had nothing to do with his ability to conceive and execute those plans. What if Dugan was just the man to craft an air campaign that would make Saddam surrender without ground fighting? Wouldn't that make it absurd to fire him for speaking on the record, for lacking "decorum"? It would have been different if someone in the press had, by investigating Dugan's record as a commander, argued that Dugan was no Patton. But the need to make that point stick escaped the media completely. (Actually, during the Dugan flap, the distinction between politically astute generals and fighting generals did creep into *The Washington Post* once—in a letter to the editor from a retired Air Force general.)

The press's handling of the Waller case was similarly deficient. Most of the coverage focused on Waller's surprising candor, the impact his comments would have on diplomacy, and on the Pentagon's attempts to put a different spin on them. A number of reports went on to indicate that Waller, like Dugan, was saying on the record what a lot of other senior commanders thought. (Mary McGrory of the *Post* was almost alone in wondering why, in light of this, Waller could stay while Dugan had to go.) But there was scarcely anyone in the press wondering on the basis of Waller's comments if he (and his fellow senior commanders too, if the stories about how Waller spoke for them as well were true) would be disastrously sluggish in any war against Iraq.

Again, there is a historical precedent that could have enriched the discussion. If there ever was a war that showed generals make a difference, it was the Civil War, in which Abraham Lincoln went through quite a cast of officers before settling on the winning leadership of Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan. Probably the general Lincoln found the most frustrating was George McClellan, whom Lincoln fired twice for lack of aggressiveness. "You remember my speaking to you of what I called your overcautiousness?" Lincoln once wrote McClellan after yet another occasion when McClellan could have taken Richmond but didn't because he was waiting for reinforcements. "Are you not overcautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing?" Another time, when McClellan put in a request for new horses, Lincoln replied, "Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?"

Being in charge of armies or fleets is just not deemed worthy of assessment or even to be of much interest to the public. That kind of coverage should apparently be reserved for politicians, rich people, business executives, rich people, movie stars and moguls, rich people—and presidential pets.

In its discussion of Waller, the press was aware of the McClellan analogy, but just barely. The sole exceptions seem to be these: In a "news analysis" piece on the Waller episode in *The New York Times*, Michael Gordon spends most of his time dwelling on press and spin, but in the 13th paragraph he does refer to McClellan. But that's all he does. "Critics of the military are already charging the generals with 'McClellanism,' " Gordon writes. He never says if *he* charges that or tries to evaluate the thesis. In his "news analysis" of the episode, the *Times*'s R. W. Apple mentions McClellan in connection with the "caution of commanders down through the ages," but Apple doesn't try to decide if Waller was just being prudent or if he was a McClellanlike disaster. In fact, Apple doesn't even venture an opinion about *McClellan*'s ability; he just notes that his tendencies toward delay plagued Lincoln. Even in discussing a war where history's jury is pretty much in, a *Times*man is loath to discuss a general's military merit—especially if there is a political angle to pursue instead.

The Dugan/Waller coverage is quite typical of the larger media trend. Being in charge of armies or fleets is just not deemed worthy of assessment or even to be of much interest to the public. That kind of coverage

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should apparently be reserved for politicians, rich people, business executives, rich people, movie stars and moguls, rich people—and presidential pets. (How many tactical nukes does Asher Edelman control?) In the past decade, there have been no articles on generals or admirals in *The New Yorker* or *Esquire*. During that time, *The New York Times Magazine* has had only five—far fewer than it has run on politicians, athletes, or actresses. During that same period, there have been virtually no analyses of generals by the influential columnists—not even in those by chest-thumping conservatives like George Will or Charles Krauthammer. *Life* magazine's list of the "100 Most Important Americans of the 20th Century" included only two generals—Douglas MacArthur and George Marshall—but somehow found room for Elizabeth Arden, Dale Carnegie, and Emily Post. *Four Stars*, a perceptive book by Mark Perry about the inner workings of the joint chiefs of staff, recently sank from the marketplace without a ripple while the bestseller list is routinely studded with such fare as *Millie's Book*, and the autobiographies of Donald Trump, Kitty Dukakis, Larry Bird, and Barry Switzer.

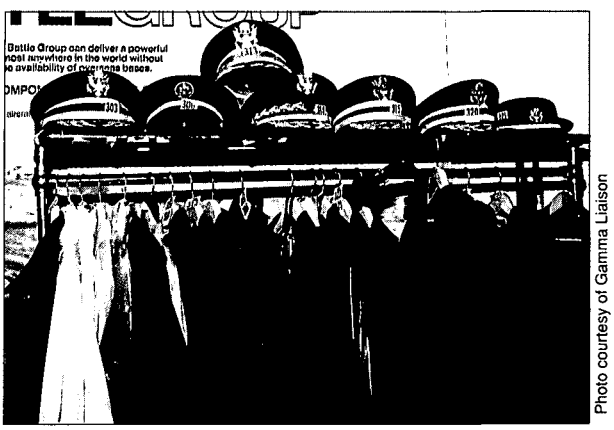

Photo courtesy of Gamma Liaison

General anesthesia

Of course with the imminence and then the onset of war, this inattention changed a little. Now, every night you can summon up a general by remote control. There's General George Crist and the banished Dugan on CBS, Admiral William Crowe and Lt. General Bernard Trainor on ABC, and Lt. General William Odom on NBC. Presumably, when they hired these men, the networks were concerned with the quality of their minds and their understanding of the complexities of war. How come the programmers didn't have this same interest when these men were still in uniform, when they were principal determinants of our war-fighting ability rather than sideline observers? General Crist, for example, was, in his last command ("CentCom," which he turned over to the Desert Storm commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf), in charge of all military plans and operations in the Middle East. In that job, Crist was responsible for the basic war plans out of which Desert Shield evolved. Why weren't the networks interested in him *then*? Now, it's true that the Pentagon can make access to active-duty and field generals difficult, but is there any evidence that, in more peaceful times, anybody in the media tried all that hard?

And even under the pressure of war, the attention given to active-duty senior officers is mostly cosmetic. This is easily verified in the cases of the Gulf war's field commander, General Schwarzkopf, and his boss, General Colin Powell, the chairman of the joint chiefs. Waiting until the day after the war started to run its profile of Schwarzkopf—this is akin to waiting until the day after a presidential election to profile the candidate who wins—*The Wall Street Journal* tells us that Schwarzkopf's father was a general in the Army and was the head of the New Jersey state police investigation of the Lindbergh kidnapping, that his nicknames are "Stormin' Norman" and "The Bear" and that he "has the build of a football player, a 170 IQ, and a passion for Tchaikovsky symphonies." That day's *USA Today* observed that Schwarzkopf is "bear-like" and a "big fellow." When a day later, *The Washington Post* decided to run *its* profile of Schwarzkopf, the newspaper informed readers that the general is nicknamed "Stormin' Norman," goes 6-3 and 240, and referring to the *Journal* as a source, noted that he had a 170 IQ. In a late-breaking bulletin, thirteen days into the war, *The* (yawn) *New York Times* used its first profile of Schwarzkopf to reveal that he is nicknamed "Stormin' Norman," and "The Bear," and that his father was a general in the Army who investigated the Lindbergh baby kidnapping.

After months of unprecedented military build-up, generals finally made the covers of *U.S. News & World Report* (Powell) and *Time* (Schwarzkopf). But even at that late date, there was nothing new on the war's military leadership. Instead, the generals started getting "reviews": *USA Today* rated Schwarzkopf "tough, compassionate, humorous, sincere." "Captivating," said Tom Shales of *The Washington Post*. What's next: "I laughed. I cried. What a poignant general staff!" —Rex Reed? Indeed, *Time*'s cover piece read pretty much like a checklist of every piece on Schwarzkopf ever written: Stormin' Norman? Check. Lindbergh baby kidnapping? Check. IQ 170? Check. 6-3, 240? Check.

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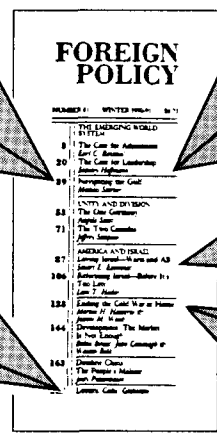

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Although all this was fascinating, there were more significant areas that went unexplored. While all the articles cited mentioned that Schwarzkopf had been the deputy commander of the Grenada invasion, none of them reported in detail on his actions and decisions during that operation, and even though it is widely agreed that the invasion was fraught with mistakes in planning and execution, none of these papers bothered to inquire whether Schwarzkopf had a hand in any of them. *The Wall Street Journal* seems to have become exceptionally disoriented on this point. "After the military's inept performance in Grenada," the paper reported, Schwarzkopf "lashed out at the lack of proper planning by the generals and admirals in charge of the operation." Did the *Journal* think that Schwarzkopf was lashing out at *himself* or that he was blaming everything on his boss?

Nine months ago, every defense reporter was writing about Dick Cheney, but who knew from CentCom? That was some obscure command stuck on some jerkwater Florida Air Force base—Jesus, the place probably didn't even have a good restaurant.

Similarly, numerous articles about Colin Powell—who undoubtedly drew more press attention than any previous chairman of the joint chiefs (quick: name two of his predecessors) because he was the first black named to the job—each tell you that he had Jamaican parents, grew up in Harlem, was a "C" student in college, and likes to repair old cars. But none of them go into any details about his previous command service. There is hardly any "background" or "without attribution" probing of senior officials in his present or past major jobs of the sort the better reporters engage in when writing about planes and tanks and that you get even in hack articles about some third-tier White House aide. You end up knowing more about Powell's relationship with Jesse Jackson than about what he did and how he did in his two previous major commands. By making a single trip to Iowa, a politician with absolutely no chance at being elected president gets subjected to far more scrutiny. And to get a handle on how David Souter thinks, the press dug up his college thesis. Well, as a senior officer on the make at Army staff and command schools, Powell surely must have left behind some kind of evidence about how he thinks about his life's work, too. Why hasn't some reporter tried to follow that lead? And Powell was the secretary of defense's top military aide during Grenada. In that position, isn't it likely that he contributed to the operation's mistakes or watched them being made but didn't know how to stop them? Unfortunately, you never find out stuff like that from the newspapers—you have to settle for learning that Powell has a working knowledge of Yiddish with which he sometimes stuns Jewish acquaintances (thank you, *Wall Street Journal*).

Just how pathetic is the coverage of generals? Well, last fall, when *The Washington Post* introduced readers to Dugan's successor, General Merrill McPeak, it didn't get into any details about McPeak's previous job commanding all the aircraft in the Pacific theater. Instead, the *Post* contented itself with sleepwalking through McPeak's resumé and adding that he is "a health-food enthusiast who has produced a fitness video," and has been known to serve "bean soup and dried fruit for lunch." And on the second day of the Gulf war, I picked up *The New York Times* in search of some information about Lt. General Charles Horner, whom I had never heard of before but who I had just learned was in charge of the Desert Storm air war. All I could get from the *Times* piece by Robert McFadden was that a longtime friend is "extremely proud" of Horner, and that he is a "tough, popular commander" and a "hard-driving, task-oriented field officer." (Just once I want to read about a senior officer who is weak and hated, lazy and abstract.) Oh yeah, and he was born in Davenport, Iowa, but attended high school in Des Moines, and has three children (I'll spare you their names).

Actually, there was one slightly more significant detail in the story. McFadden refers to how the American experience in Vietnam "heavily influenced the general's perceptions of modern warfare." Since Iraq began heating up, this has been a *de rigueur* reference in stories about our top military men. McFadden quotes Horner saying, "A war in Iraq should not be dragged out in an effort to achieve some political objective." The "lessons of Vietnam" paragraph is a staple of pieces on the current wave of military commanders. But you can tell by the way they're used that not much thought goes into writing them. (McFadden never probes Horner's statement.) I wouldn't be surprised if there's a special key on the Atex terminals of McFadden and his fellow guild members that's marked "LOV." Hit it and you get passages such as: "Like most of his top officers in the Middle

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East, Schwarzkopf learned about combat and command in the jungles of Southeast Asia—learned above all what *not* to do." (*Life*). " 'The three-stars and the four-stars have been left alone to do their jobs,' a State Department official says." (*The Wall Street Journal*). "The massive deployment in Saudi Arabia clearly reflects one lesson of Vietnam. 'When something starts . . . I'm not sure we'd want to deal a lot with measured escalation,' says Lt. General Thomas Kelly, head of operations for the joint staff at the Pentagon." (*U.S. News & World Report*). "Once you have a clear political objective, you have to make sure that . . . the nation commits enough resources to do the job. Then we must give the commanders enough flexibility to achieve their goals. In Vietnam, it didn't work out that way." (Powell, in *The Washingtonian*). "I can assure you that if we have to go to war, I am going to use every single thing that is available to me to bring as much destruction to the Iraqi forces as rapidly as I possibly can in the hopes of winning victory as quickly as possible." (Schwarzkopf, in *The New York Times*).

Fact is, lines like these are far too rarely followed by investigations of whether the generals involved are willing to use nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons to accomplish their "objective," or of how high they think casualty rates can go and still be an acceptable way to do the "job," or of how they regard civilian casualties. When you get down to it, what's the difference between this last statement of Schwarzkopf's and the ones by Dugan that got him fired? (The ones that the *Times* said *should* have gotten Dugan fired.) And what were the lessons of Vietnam that Powell and Schwarzkopf applied or failed to apply to Grenada? You could read reams of press about these two and never get an answer to that one. During the build-up to war in the Gulf, we were treated to piece after piece on planes and tanks, but here's one that never got written: "The Generals: How will they do?"

The soft machine

So there you have it—the press stinks at covering generals. Why? The explanation is mostly a combination of ignorance, elitism, and lazy journalism.

Ignorance. Most reporters, like most other Americans, have never served in the military, so they have no personal insight into what makes for good or bad performance in military jobs. (A telling indication: Most papers treated General Schwarzkopf's efforts to get free mail for his troops and his redesign of their boots as quaint little sidebar items—whereas soldiers know that on deployment overseas you live in your boots and mail is your principal form of entertainment, so in fact these actions of Schwarzkopf's said quite a lot about him as a field commander. While *The New York Times* did once run a front-page story mentioning Schwarzkopf's attempts to get radios and newspapers for his troops, the more blue-collar *USA Today* was alone among all newspapers in including the mail and boot details in its profile of the general.)

So to most of the press, generals are as indistinguishable as their uniforms. This attitude readily translates into "one general's as good as another," an attitude reinforced by a lack of attunement to military history. Maximilian was no Napoleon, Burnside was no Grant, and Von Paulus was no Rommel. And this belief in turn promotes the idea that it's weapons that are the determinant of victory—another notion refuted so often in history. At Pearl Harbor, the difference wasn't hardware: the U.S. had radar and air defenses, and could have used antitorpedo netting to protect its capital ships; what's more, the U.S. was reading the message traffic of the approaching Japanese fleet. No, the official postmortem on the attack attributed the disaster to "the complete inadequacy of command." Another example: When, in 1986, the U.S. botched the attack against Libya, it wasn't because it didn't have weapons capable of doing a better job—our inventory then contained the same stealth fighters and Tomahawk cruise missiles that are now being credited with such spectacular success in the Gulf—it was because the military planners had decided not to use those weapons.

Elitism. Most reporters come from the educated professional class that views the military not as an interesting opportunity for national service but as a dreaded and thoroughly simple-minded occupation. It's absurd but true that in our culture, being a military man carries considerably less cachet than working at Century 21. H.G. Wells gave voice to what a lot of other journalists think when he wrote, "The professional military mind is by necessity an inferior and unimaginative mind; no man of high intellectual quality would willingly imprison his gifts in such a calling."

Richard Cohen of *The Washington Post*, in writing about the Dugan affair, referred to the general as a "talkative flyboy airhead." Could Cohen's scorn have something to do with his six months' active-duty experience as an Army clerical worker? Now, even if Cohen disagreed with say, Lee Iacocca or James Baker on some matter, he would never call either man an "airhead"—although managing the Air Force well takes every bit as much brainpower as managing Chrysler or the State Department. Apparently, antimilitary venom runs so deep in Cohen that he wasn't able to bring himself to notice that, for example, the feat that generals like Dugan and Schwarzkopf accomplished in supervising the setting

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up of U.S. forces in the desert is at least the equivalent of moving all of Chrysler's operations to a new location, and within a few months, turning out cars again. In short, reporters' ignorance of what goes into military command is deepened exponentially by their contempt for military commanders.

Laziness. It's just plain easier to cover people in glitzy jobs, people who hold press conferences and have press offices that spoonfeed you prepared handouts, than to ferret out and report on those beneath them—like generals—in the more anonymous government positions, people who often wield as much or more real power. Nine months ago, every defense reporter was writing about Dick Cheney, but who knew from CentCom? That was some obscure command stuck on some jerkwater Florida Air Force base—Jesus, the place probably didn't even have a good restaurant. It's the same on the domestic side: at the agencies and on the Hill, for the most part, the press still can't be bothered with investigating the personal and committee staff members who make things happen and who effectively control their more well-known bosses. And the point can be made even further down into the bowels of government. There are legions of GS-14s and -15s, lieutenant colonels and colonels, in key slots that the press never scrutinizes. Reporters trying to fathom government should be going after power. But there is glamorous power and unglamorous power, and too often journalists go only after the glamor—which is admittedly more fun. In doing so, they miss at least half the story.

The upshot is that once you get away from the core big jobs in government—like the President, his staff, the secretaries of Defense, State, Treasury, the handful of truly high-profile members of Congress—the ardor of reporters dramatically shrivels. It's really to the point where the secretary of agriculture only gets coverage when he tells a racist joke; for the secretary of HUD, it took presiding over a raging scandal. And generals? What do they have to do to draw even minimal notice from the press? Go to war.

Yes, before the shooting starts it's pretty damn hard to write a piece showing that General Blowzit is probably not the man to command the tanks in the Gulf and that General Knowzit is. Of course, once the tanks go into battle under Blowzit and get cut to pieces because of his mistakes, the papers will be glad to write about him and Knowzit because then the reporters have all those ready-to-hand tank hulks to ground the story with. But why wait for disaster before doing journalistic appraisal?

If, prior to the Nazi invasion in 1940, the French people had been informed in their newspapers about their generals' antiquated and inflexible defense plans, perhaps pressure would have built to remove them in favor of younger officers like De Gaulle and Leclerc who probably wouldn't have squandered the manpower, artillery, and tank advantages the French had over the Germans. If in 1941, reporters had investigated and written about the lax attitudes the local commanders Admiral Husband Kimmel and Lt. General Walter Short had towards alerts and force dispersal (and about the niggardly attitude the service chiefs in Washington had towards sharing intelligence with them), Pearl Harbor probably wouldn't have happened (or at least it wouldn't have been a surprise). Similarly, if there had been press coverage of General Lloyd Fredenhall's lack of familiarity with tank warfare, maybe Patton would have been brought in to replace him *before* the Anglo-American force under Fredenhall got chewed up at the Kasserine Pass—the second-worst U.S. defeat at the hands of the Germans in World War II. Or to take a current example: *The New York Times* waited until eleven days into the Gulf war to tell us that the key generals Dick Cheney appointed two years ago when he took over at Defense were "more open to military intervention" than their predecessors. Wouldn't you have liked to have known that *then*?

Recently, *U.S. News & World Report* made a commendable bid to go beyond the journalistic conventions about military reporting when it ran an essay about generals by history professor and former Marine colonel Allan Millett. But while Millett's piece stood way above the pack with its historical illustrations of how generalship can be decisive, it concluded that good generalship is an "intangible quality," a "mystique." This is a dangerous sentiment. Journalists should never presume that something that important to national life is a mystery, resistant to all reporting and analysis. That's giving up the game before it starts. Sure, as hard as it is to figure out whether or not the M-1 is a good tank, it's a hell of a lot harder to figure out if Blowzit is a good tank general. But since when is easiness a criterion for what kind of stories ought to get done?

During his briefing on the first day of the Gulf war, Lt. General Horner said, "It has been in some respects a technology war, although it is fought by men and women." Despite this, the press always seems too readily lured by the equipment into overlooking the human elements of combat. Now, media people know that having a better computer, more staff, and a bigger office doesn't mean that a reporter will write better stories. So why can't they figure this out about the military? Like any other reasonably complex task, fighting a war has objective and subjective components. And the quality of command is one of those subjective components that is essential to a war's outcome. Isn't it high time reporters covered it just as vigorously as the obvious physical stuff? □

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WHO'S WHO

Who are the three individuals in the White House who have gained the most from the Gulf crisis? George Bush is clearly the leading beneficiary. Less obvious are the other two, **John Sununu**, whose involvement in the budget bungle and the William Bennett fiasco were mercifully obscured by the fog of war, and **Richard Haass**, whose climb from a very minor role on the Middle East desk of the National Security Council to the status of key player was fueled by the rapidly escalating importance of the Gulf. . . .

Another minor White House aide, **Ede Holiday**'s deputy, **Olin Wethington**, is not enjoying similar success in his effort to play a major role—in his case, in energy policy. Wethington's enterprise is not widely appreciated by other government officials involved in energy issues. . . .

Outside the White House, the administration's biggest gainer from the war has been **Dick Cheney**, who just last summer was reported to be out of the foreign policy loop, fishing in Wyoming while the insiders were preparing for the summit. . . .

Congressional Democrats, whose annual lobbyist-financed retreat at the lavish Greenbrier Hotel has come under criticism recently, have decided to try to avoid unpleasant comment by a change of venue to the Williamsburg Inn, which on a scale of posh probably rates an eight or nine to the Greenbrier's 10, but still abounds in tasteful luxury plus golf and tennis. . . .

Many observers have wondered why there are so few Jews in high positions in the current administration. Perhaps there is a hint of the answer in the fact that **George Bush**, his counsel, **C.** (for **Clayland**) **Boyden Gray**, and his chief of protocol, **Joseph D. Reed**, have all been members of the Jupiter Island Club, an exclusive residential community in Hobe Sound, Florida, the bylaws of which have historically barred Jews. . . .

Lamar Alexander seems likely to be more sympathetic to minority scholarships than some of his conservative subordinates at the Department of Education. When he was editor of the student paper at the University of Tennessee, he was a strong advocate of the admission of blacks to what was then an all-white institution. And when he became president of the University of Tennessee, he hired the school's first black vice president. . . .

If you have wondered whether there are any doves in the White House, the answer is not now. But there were some before January 16. They were outside the small circle involved in the decision to go to war and did not speak up because of bureaucratic caution, and because they believed **Saddam Hussein** would cave. . . .

Much of **Charles Keating**'s Lincoln Savings and Loan disaster could have been prevented if **Fernand St. Germain**, then the chairman of the House Banking Committee, had heeded an early 1988 memo from his chief investigator, **Gary Bowser**, recommending that hearings be held on Lincoln. . . .

Clayton Yeutter, the new RNC chief, is not acting like the "breath of fresh air" that Rep. **Beryl Anthony** called him when the former Nixon fundraiser joined the Reagan team in 1987. Despite Yeutter's stale attempt to bring the Gulf war to congressional districts with his vow to ostracize lawmakers who voted against war, the former agriculture secretary is no **Lee Atwater**. It won't work, say GOP operatives, who are less than thrilled with Yeutter's selection. After all, Transportation Secretary **Sam Skinner** and Commerce Secretary **Robert Mosbacher** both turned down the dead-end job. Most decisions will be made by White House chief of staff John Sununu. Sununu, Mosbacher, and **Robert Teeter** are fighting for control of the 1992 campaign. . . .

Despite efforts by some RNC dissidents to oust **Richard Darman**, the OMB director has consolidated his power. He dominated the drafting of the president's State of the Union address, ensuring that the domestic agenda would reflect his imprint. Darman continues to feud with **Roger Porter**, the president's assistant for economic and domestic policy, who has decided to forfeit his tenure at Harvard and remain at the White House. . . .

The White House is hoping to profit from the well-heeled connections of former baseball commissioner **Peter Ueberroth**, who lives in Newport Beach, California, and knows many people with lots of money. Ueberroth has become head of the publicly financed, $20 million National Tree Trust, Bush's tree-planting initiative. . . .

When **Jason DeParle**, an alumnus of this magazine who is now with *The New York Times*, asked **Jim Pinkerton**, the White House aide who says George Bush is "the first president to govern in the spirit of The New Paradigm," for specific examples of New Paradigm presidential actions, the conversation went like this:

"Civil rights for the disabled," he says.

And what else?

Mr. Pinkerton pauses and hunts down an April speech where the phrase 'New Paradigm' fell from presidential lips.

"I think the president's said enough about this to be properly credited with a significant role in this. . . . I truly mean that.

"Sincerely." . . .

In—*Agriculture*: Secretary—**Edward Madigan**. *White House*: Staff Secretary—**Phillip D. Brady**. *Agencies and Commissions*: Director, Selective Service System—**Robert William Gambino**.

Out—*Agriculture*: Secretary—**Clayton K. Yeutter**. *Transportation:* General Counsel—**Phillip D. Brady**. *White House*: Associate Director, Office of Cabinet Affairs—**Barry McBee**, Special Assistant for Agriculture Trade and Food Assistance—**Cooper Evans**, Assistant for Management and Administration—**J. Bonnie Newman**, Deputy to Chief of Staff—**James W. Cicconi**. *Agencies and Commissions*: Administrator, Small Business Administration—**Susan S. Engeleiter**. Director, Selective Service System—**Samuel K. Lessey Jr**.

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

KICKBACKS 101

The University of the District of Columbia recently considered offering former Washington D.C. mayor Marion Barry a teaching position in the school's department of criminal justice.

NAAHH, THEY'RE EASY TO TELL APART: IT ONLY TAKES NINE MONTHS TO FIND OUT IF THE CONDOMS WORK

The Washington Post reports that the Northrop Corporation—prime contractor for the B-2 stealth bomber—has taken legal action to prevent a Texas company from marketing what it calls "stealth condoms." The prophylactics come in packages shaped like the bat-winged aircraft—$5 for a package of three (one red, one white, one blue). Northrop contends that this use of the name "is likely to cause confusion, or to cause mistake or to deceive."

"GENERAL, THE VICE PRESIDENT HAS A TRAINING IDEA HE THINKS YOU'LL WANT TO TRY OUT."

According to *The Washington Post*, as part of a drill, security police at Andrews Air Force Base—the troops charged with protecting Air Force One—hid two sticks of live dynamite in the wheel well of a pickup that happened to be parked on the base. When the truck's unsuspecting owner later drove off, the authorities couldn't locate the bomb-laden vehicle for 12 hours. One of the explosive devices was never found.

OK, THE ONE WITH THE LOWEST LEGAL BILLS PICKS UP THE TAB

Photograph by Bill Cunningham/The New York Times

CHAIRMANSHIP

Recently, after raising tuition 9 percent, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents also decided to replace the chairs in its campus meeting room with 21 new ones costing more than $1,000 apiece.

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FINE-TUNING THE FREE MARKET . . .

Stock Buybacks: The Corporate Con You're Still Falling For

Instead of putting capital into new plants and improved products, America's CEOs had a better idea: They invested it in themselves

by Mark Fischetti

Late one night, while waiting for the company limousine, you pour yourself a drink and ponder your life as a CEO: the bonuses, the golden parachute, the private elevator with the polished doors. Perfect—or rather, it *would* be, if it weren't for those busybody shareholders constantly whining that their stock is stalled. What to do? Invest in a new plant and expand production? Pay a few dweebs in white coats to develop some new techno-doohickey that'll really wow Wall Street? . . . Nah, the very thoughts make you tired. Life is so unfair, you think. If only you could boost stock prices, get rid of some shareholders, and maybe reap a few million bucks for yourself in the process. All without really working.

You can. In fact, CEOs have been doing it for years, thanks to Wall Street's best-kept secret: the stock buyback plan. For a classic demonstration, consider the owners of the Washington Redskins. Back in the early seventies, Jack Kent Cooke, Milton King, and Edward Bennett Williams sat on the board of Pro Football Inc., the parent company of the Redskins. From that position, they quietly bought out other shareholders to take complete ownership of the team. It was quite an expensive purchase—which is why they used other people's money to make it.

During the sixties, George Preston Marshall owned 520 of the 1,000 shares in Pro Football, Williams and his two cohorts held minority positions, and the public held the rest. As Williams came to control more of the daily activities of the company, he directed Pro Football to begin buying back public shares, using company money, for the sole purpose of increasing the board members' relative share. Then, after Marshall died in 1972, Williams—the executor of Marshall's estate—had Pro Football buy and retire Marshall's 520 shares.

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That transaction alone cost Pro Football $8.8 million, but when they were through, Williams, Cooke, and King owned the entire franchise.

Problem was, the Redskins had nowhere near that kind of money. So the trio put Pro Football into debt—major debt—to finance the purchases. Although the three owners wouldn't talk, sources at *Sports Illustrated* and *The Washington Post* put the debt service alone at between $600,000 and $1 million per year. And Joe Fan picked up the tab. By 1978, the Redskins had the highest ticket prices in the National Football League. Williams, Cooke, and King had managed to bill consumers— in this case ticket buyers—to get control of the company, and of its profits. Today, industry watchers estimate that, thanks to soaring TV revenues, the franchise is worth over $150 million, 10 times what it was worth in 1972. There are no outside stockholders left to benefit from that surge. And Cooke, the only surviving member of the original troika, sure hasn't shared the wealth (in the form, say, of cut-rate tickets) with the little people who made it all possible.

Stock response

By now, we've all heard the cautionary tales: How Kravis, Bass, and other corporate raiders made billions during the eighties while driving American companies into debt, impervious to the impact on jobs or national competitiveness. Stock buybacks have many of the same effects—they just work more insidiously, since nobody's complaining. Last year, U.S. companies bought back more than $12 billion in stock, according to Goldman Sachs partner Steven Einhorn. That money generally didn't result in better cars, lower food prices, or even cheaper tickets to Redskins' games. It didn't result in leaner, smarter business management. It didn't help us as we slid further into recession, unable to trade our wares in a tight international market. It did result in hefty profits for the executives who engineered the deals.

In major food, metal, manufacturing, and other companies across the U.S., CEOs divert millions of dollars from the quest for innovative products, breakthrough production technologies, cleaner waste management, and better-paying jobs. Then they spend it all manipulating the market to enrich themselves and their shareholders.

So why haven't you heard about this corporate con? Because most business managers, stock analysts, and reporters have fallen for the buyback's illusory benefits.

Even the most savvy dailies and trade magazines are infatuated with buybacks. As Quantum Chemical took on crippling loans to finance a buyback, *Forbes* ran a story called "Saddled with Debt But Still Able to Grow." A *Wall Street Journal* story about dividends fueled by buybacks bore the headline, "Metals Producers Are Basking in a Cash Glow, And Move to Share the Luster with Holders." A Tenneco buyback, announced in the face of takeover threats, was described by *Business Week* as "potent shark repellent," even though Tenneco would have to take on $3 billion in debt to finance the purchase.

A buyback works like this: Say there are 1 million shares of stock in XYZ Inc., a defense contractor that builds sophisticated Zealot antimissile missiles. XYZ executives own 500,000 shares of the company, and the other 500,000 are held by various investors. If XYZ officers want to increase earnings per share, or reduce the relative ownership of outsiders and, with it, their influence on the company, they can buy up the public shares, using the company's money.

When the shares are purchased by the company, they are "torn up"—they cease to exist, since a company cannot own stock in itself. If XYZ executives buy 100,000 shares, for example, they then control 500,000 shares out of *900,000*, or 55.6 percent, instead of the 50 percent they used to control. Why doesn't this powerplay gall small investors? Because of the built-in bonanza: Even if the company's earnings remain level, they are divided over 900,000 shares instead of 1 million. Thus, earnings per share increase.

Furthermore, after a buyback is announced, the share price tends to rise a bit, thanks to the conventional wisdom among stock traders that higher earnings per share mean a stock is more valuable, and therefore is worth a higher price. Brokers and analysts recommend that their clients buy XYZ, and the activity further drives up the price per share.

So XYZ has more control, the stockholders make more money, and the shares increase in value. What's so bad about a buyback? Well, there's one minor detail: Buying back shares isn't free. If XYZ execs want to buy 100,000 shares, and the shares are trading at $30, they have to spend $3 million of the company's money to buy them.

That means one of two things: large cuts in the company's cash flow or, if XYZ's execs borrow money to complete the transaction, big corporate debt. Either way, huge quantities of cash are diverted from long-term improvements at XYZ—say, inventing a more sensitive homing device for the Zealot, decreasing costs of production, accelerating and simplifying delivery during international crises. Such capital investments would surely pay off in the long run, making the Zealot more attractive to nations now smitten with the French competitor. Even a small increase in orders would boost the depressed region where XYZ

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is located, and possibly give jobs to the 15 percent of the local population now unemployed. But instead, XYZ spends its $3 million on a corporate facelift: the artificial price boost a buyback gives a stock. Unfortunately, like a facelift, that boost usually doesn't last long. For proof of that, you don't need XYZ. Just take a look at the venerable *Washington Post*, where blind faith in the buyback may ultimately hurt not just its stockholders, but its coverage.

Post-mortem

Throughout the eighties, Chairman Katharine Graham and her Washington Post Co. used buybacks to drive the share price up and up, to a high of $311 in October 1989. Then the tide turned against publishing, but Graham's company kept buying, spending $175 million in the first quarter of 1990. Instead of going up, the stock price slid down to $250. The company bought more. By January Washington Post stock had declined to around $190. Not only did the share price lose ground in 1990, but earnings per share did as well, dropping more than a dollar from the 1989 $15.50 dividend. President Richard Simmons recently predicted another decrease in earnings per share for 1991.

So, in the long run, the buybacks not only failed to bring better earnings, they virtually ensured a worse *Washington Post*. In the midst of the recession, with ad lineage off 11 percent from a year ago, the *Post* could use the hundreds of millions it spent on buybacks to run more stories, hire more reporters, and go after more potential advertisers. But most of that money is gone.

The *Post* was far from alone in its costly infatuation. In the financially roaring eighties, it was indeed hard to find a buyback that didn't work in the short term. The economy was growing, and many companies had more cash on hand than they could handle. So they bought back stock, driving its price up and making their shareholders happy. With easy credit, often based on junk bonds, even companies that weren't doing well could play the game.

After Black Monday, buybacks became even more attractive, as the stock prices of hundreds of companies took a nose dive. Executives at solid firms knew their stock would rebound, at least somewhat, so they bought their own shares because it seemed like a sound investment. The corporate raiding following the crash accelerated the practice. If your company was threatened by a takeover artist, one of your best defenses was to gobble up so much of your own outstanding stock that the raider could not gain control, or to bolster the stock price enough to make the takeover too expensive.

Once learned, the buyback proved a tough habit to break. Today, the economy is no longer booming, credit is no longer easy, and the raiding has largely ceased. The stock market has been slipping for almost a year now. The hemorrhaging real-estate market is dragging down investors nationwide, and economists are finally saying the R-word. It's riskier than ever to go into debt. But many executives are still playing the buyback game. Why? Because besides offering a short-term gain to shareholders, buybacks often mean a windfall for CEOs.

Purina cravings

The desire of big stockholders for quarterly profits has driven many a chief executive to forget about long-term strategy. Especially when the chief executive himself is a big stockholder. There's no better example of this than Ralston Purina, the St. Louis-based owner of everything from dog food to Wonder Bread to Chex Mix.

In 1986, Ralston's board made a breathtaking offer to the company's top execs: If the stock price hit $100 and stayed there for 10 consecutive trading days, the executives would take home a bonus of 491,000 free shares, worth a cool $49.1 million. Ralston's chairman and CEO, William P. Stiritz, would get 160,000 of those shares, three top vice-presidents would get 40,000 shares apiece, and other managers would get smaller awards. At the time, the $100 mark seemed a pretty tall order: Ralston stock was selling at around $60 a share. But the brass ring was enormous. And to Stiritz, the way to reach it was perfectly clear.

Since taking over in 1981, Stiritz has spearheaded one of the most aggressive and prolonged buyback programs ever seen in the United States. Under him, Ralston has spent almost $3 billion, more than 95 percent of its earnings, on its own stock. By early October 1990, finally, the grail was in sight. So Ralston directors authorized another buyback of 2 million shares. That put them over the top. Stiritz got his 160,000 shares, worth $16 million.

Ralston argues that its stock plan benefited not just Stiritz but *all* shareholders, and quite handsomely at that; while the company's earnings have doubled since Stiritz took over, the per-share profits have quadrupled. But now that the plateau has been reached, Ralston's stock is going down. Indeed, by early January, the stock price had slipped to $93.

Ralston has always generated a lot of cash: $250 million a year in play money, after dividends. But it also carries almost $2 billion in long-term debt, most of it used to finance buybacks. "The buyback has been Ralston's only game," says Timothy Ramey, an

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analyst with County NatWest in New York City. "They haven't done much to improve performance."

Ralston, Coca-Cola, and other cash-rich retailers are particularly susceptible to the buyback disease. Managers at those firms argue that, especially during a recession, buybacks are their safest investment. What if they spent the cash acquiring a company that wound up doing poorly? Or overspent to develop new products consumers don't want, and then wasted even more money on large ad campaigns to promote those products? To them, a buyback is a small risk with a predictable return.

Such cautious management may be shortsighted and fainthearted, since risks and sturdy R&D drive the best American companies. But it also may be disingenuous. A thorough evaluation of a buyback's merit must include this simple question: Who gains the most? Clearly at Ralston the answer is not American consumers, but the company's top executives. And their stock-driven compensation package does not stand alone. "In the last 10 years the emphasis in senior executive pay has shifted from salary and cash awards to stock options," notes Ted Buyniski of Sibson & Co., a Princeton, New Jersey, consulting firm that specializes in compensation. "For many top executives, as much as half their total pay is now tied to increases in stock prices and stock earnings."

The object of stock options, Buyniski says, is to focus executives on measures that increase shareholder wealth. But many executives have concentrated almost exclusively on improving short-term stock performance. With a buyback, they can fulfill their mandate and profit personally as well, without improving the company or its products. "If you're going to structure compensation to stock options," says Buyniski, "tie it to long-term performance." Unfortunately, only a few companies are taking Buyniski's advice.

Catch-as-catch con

Granted, for recession-proof, liquid companies like Ralston or Coca-Cola, buybacks may be lazy, but they probably won't prove catastrophic. But for companies in industries with cyclical downturns, they can.

The real danger of buybacks comes when a company should be using its money to reduce debt or just survive. "If they try a buyback and the stock goes up, but it comes right back down once the buying has stopped, they've blown the money they could've used to keep their operations going," says Len Hyman, an enlightened analyst with Merrill Lynch in New York City. That's advice several metals companies could stand to heed.

North American steel, aluminum, copper, and nickel concerns that were ailing in the early eighties found themselves wading in cash by the end of the decade, thanks to improvements in efficiency made in response to competition from overseas makers. That's the good news. But while Alcan Aluminum could have used its new money to wipe out its debt, and Phelps Dodge and Inland Steel might've financed a permanent comeback, pressure from investors got to them. All three began buyback programs and retired shares, and announced special dividends.

Alcan, based in Montreal, has continued on this course. It bought back almost 5 million shares in fiscal 1990, and then announced in October that it would seek to purchase 15 million more—almost 7 percent of its outstanding stock—in 1991. At the October share price of $19.25, the transaction would cost $480 million. Duncan Curry, Alcan's manager of investor relations, defends the company's practice, saying "it would be a fair criticism to say we should use the money to invest in R&D if we were solely using the money to buy shares, but we budgeted $1 billion in 1991 for a capital spending program." Besides, he adds, since the metals industry is cyclical, investors want cash when it's on hand. And the company does what it can to deliver.

You can take it with you

Of course, resisting stockholders' shortsighted demands to preserve the long-term health of the corporation takes plenty of tact and diplomacy. But giving in may mean giving up the store. Just ask CBS, which capitulated to the desires of a powerful stockholder who already had both feet in the grave.

In December, CBS Inc. announced a huge buyback—10 million shares, at a cost of $2 billion. The reason: The estate of company founder William S. Paley, who died in October, found itself with an enormous estate tax bill due by July 1991. Paley's family didn't have nearly enough cash, so it initiated discussions with CBS about a buyback. In order not to change the profile of current ownership, CBS decided to make a fixed price, "pro rata" offer, meaning CBS would buy the same percentage of each shareholder's stake. The company would pay $190 for each share.

Paley's estate, which owned 1.4 million shares, or 5.5 percent of those outstanding, will make $108 million on the deal. But one other entity will also profit greatly—Loews Corp., which owns 24.5 percent of the outstanding shares. Loews originally bought its shares at an average of $125; the prorated sale of its stake, at $190 a share, will result in a profit of $165

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million. Who runs Loews? CBS President Laurence Tisch.

In December, CBS announced it expected a fourth-quarter loss, the first quarterly loss in the company's long history. The bad news was caused by a $55 million after-tax loss from coverage of Major League Baseball, lower than anticipated ad revenues, and higher costs sustained by news coverage of the Persian Gulf build up. Fourth-quarter earnings per share, it said, would be down from $1.10, where they had been each quarter for two years. Furthermore, CBS said it expected "unfavorable earnings" in 1991 because of the worsening advertising climate, continued losses on baseball coverage, and the loss of lucrative contracts to air the Super Bowl and the NBA playoffs.

CBS admitted that "the loss of income from the $2 billion used to consummate the [buyback] offer" will have a "dilutive impact" on earnings per share, which "will outweigh the effect of having fewer outstanding shares." In other words, the usual effect of a buyback—increased earnings and stock price—will not occur. In fact, due to the announcement of expected losses in 1991, coupled with the large evaporation of cash, the stock dropped precipitously in January, after the buyback was completed.

All this to serve one family's estate-tax problem. To be fair, William Paley did found the company and was essential to its growth, making his shareholders wealthy in the first place. But the buyback could be a critical blow in a recession. At the very least, it will hurt CBS's employees. In its 30-page announcement of the buyback and its anticipated effects, CBS noted that to mitigate 1991 losses it will reduce operating costs "wherever possible," implement "reductions in personnel levels, both by attrition and otherwise," and reduce "the amount of annual compensation the company pays its affiliated stations."

Whitmanhandled

CBS's buyback will roughly halve the trading value of the company, leaving the stockholders with about 13 million shares worth about $2.3 billion. That's a virtual invitation to takeover kingpins who, prior to the buyback, would have needed $4 billion to cover outstanding shares.

That a buyback would make it easier for a corporate raider is a new twist. Usually it's the other way around. Defensive buybacks came into vogue after the crash, when raiders like Carl Icahn and Asher Edelman sought to accumulate undervalued stock. Executives responded by buying up outstanding shares to ensure either that the raiders couldn't get control or that the stock price would be out of reach.

Perhaps in these cases the buyback can be justified as a small sin necessary to prevent a greater one—a bogus takeover that would result in the dismantling of a company and the loss of many jobs. Phillips Petroleum, for example, successfully used a buyback plan to fend off T. Boone Pickens Jr. Goodyear repurchased shares to beat back Sir James Goldsmith.

But there is a price to be paid for this tactic, and some companies have paid dearly. Consider Whitman Corp., a $3 billion consumer goods conglomerate in Chicago best known for its Whitman Sampler chocolates. In September 1988 Whitman was already buying back 500,000 shares a month from the 107 million shares outstanding. Then it announced it would buy back 3.4 million more shares, worth about $125 million, from Carl Pohlad and MEI Diversified Inc., of which Pohlad was chairman. Whitman feared Pohlad and his clan were seeking control of the company.

Whitman borrowed money and got the shares, and Pohlad lost interest. Some observers sympathize with Whitman's execs, saying they had no other option. But as County NatWest's Ramey observes, "A takeover might have been the best thing that could have happened for shareholders, considering what's happened since." At the time of the Pohlad threat, Whitman's stock was selling at around $36. By May 1989, eight months later, it was at $26, and Whitman had $1.6 billion in debt. By the end of 1990 the stock was trading at around $18, and Whitman was selling off divisions to raise money. With executives like that, who needs raiders?

Rediscovering rocket science

Looking back over the eighties, Kevin Phillips recently noted that, more and more, people speak of American economic hegemony in the past tense. The buyback is one of the many corporate cons that make such laments ring true. As dividends shrink and the market slides, maybe the very shareholders who benefit from buybacks will start to question why highly paid executives aren't reinvesting revenue to improve the real growth of their companies.

"Buybacks are easy," says Ramey. "They're not rocket science. Shareholders have to wonder why they're paying top executives millions of dollars a year if all they do is buy back stock with the cash the company earns." If more reporters, analysts, and investors began to see through the buyback's sham virtues, more CEOs would start investing in innovation—which would mean a dividend not just for captains of industry and their stockholders, but for dwindling American competitiveness, too. □

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FINE-TUNING THE FREE MARKET . . .

Beyond Beauty Schools

There are lots of things the government should train the poor to do. Sculpting nails isn't one of them.

by Katherine Boo

Tommy Wayne Downs spent the eighties in the ghettoes of Nashville, selling permanent waves as the path to the American dream. With just six months' training at his school of hair design, Downs cajoled, erstwhile welfare moms could earn $30,000 a year as stylists in Nashville's tonier salons.

If Downs had a talent for this rags-to-riches spiel, it was probably because their rags were *his* riches: for every poor student he lured in, he reaped thousands of dollars in federal student aid. *Guaranteed* student aid, intended by Congress to ensure all students an affordable education, whether at Harvard or Downs's school of hair design.

Before long, though, Downs discovered an easier way than ghetto-combing to drum up federal student loans: eliminate the middleman—the student. One March day, he simply made up a name, an address, and a social security number and applied for a guaranteed federal loan on the imaginary student's behalf. To his astonishment, it worked. So he tried again and again. By the time his secretary inadvertently tipped off the feds a few years later, his ghost graduates had reaped hundreds of thousands of dollars in government loans. Why'd he do it? To an entrepreneur like Downs, that's a pretty stupid question. "I mean, you are talking about the ability to steal *unfathomable* amounts of money."

In 1989, Downs was sentenced to 11 years in prison for criminal fraud and ordered to repay $175,000; to the Department of Education, this case is closed. But in their own way, the feds too forgot the middlemen—the thousands of *real* students who mistook Downs's entrepreneurial zeal for a genuine educational opportunity. Today, many of the men and women who viewed his federally sanctioned trade school as a ticket out of poverty are still holed up in the Nashville projects. Only now, they owe thousands in loans.

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Yes, Downs may have sacrificed students while reaping a fortune in federal aid. But in the crazy world of government-subsidized vocational education, *that* offense is unindictable.

During the eighties, countless Hirsches and Blooms stepped forward to deplore the quality of elite education. Yet few discussed the trade school training available to the 50 percent of Americans who will never go to college at all. "Noncollege youth," sociologists call them, defining them by what they don't have. That's not just an accident of semantics. Although 82 million U.S. jobs don't require a college degree, our education system has long been geared to train the white-collar class.

That's never been more true than now, as basic academics reclaim high school classrooms, and vocational training falls by the wayside. In itself, mind you, that's a pretty smart move: deciding which 14-year-old gets Wordsworth and which gets welding is simply too dangerous a responsibility for a school system as marred by racism and classism as ours. Besides, research consistently shows that solid reading and math skills are more fundamental to workplace success than the minutiae of some ever-changing technology. Yet, as the public schools retrench, more of America's blue- and pink-collar workforce now spawns in private institutions—which spawns the likes of Tommy Wayne Downs.

Today, more than 2 million U.S. students attend 4,000 accredited private trade schools, the ugly stepchild of American higher education. With their six- to twelve-month courses for incipient truckers, computer repairmen, secretaries, and beauticians, those schools consume nearly 30 percent of the federal government's grants and guaranteed loans for higher education. That's not an inexpensive phenomenon. Thanks to an annual $2 billion federal liability for defaulted school loans—a disproportionate percentage of it from trade schools—the federal student aid program now teeters, in the words of Senator Sam Nunn, "on the brink of disaster."

But while sensational default costs earn headlines and congressional hearings, they're a symptom of more subtle, basic flaws: the quality and kind of training we eagerly subsidize for millions of noncollege youth. Over the past five years, more than $50 million in federal loans and grants went to the following federally approved institutions:

➤The Culinary School of Washington, whose students paid $6,900 for the privilege of frying eggs and flipping burgers—without pay—in the cafeteria of a local sewage treatment plant.

➤A Miami respiratory therapist training school with broken equipment and a notable entrance: a hole blasted in the drywall of an X-rated record and tape store.

➤A Chicago trucking school that enrolled students too physically disabled to turn the steering wheel or reach the gears.

➤An Ohio heating and ventilation repair school housed in a fruit stand, whose students scavenged garbage dumps for broken equipment to work on.

Finding glaring educational failures in the federal student loan program is like hunting in a wildlife preserve—there are almost too many easy targets. But federally accredited fruit stands are less amusing when you consider that trade schools like these produce more than a third of America's front-line work force. And you don't have to look at the stagnant GNP to realize it's a spotty front line. According to the National Alliance of Business, 75 percent of CEOs observe declining skills in their entry-level workforce; *Industry Week* notes that two-thirds of American personnel officers report difficulty finding workers with adequate technical skills.

By the year 2000, the skill gap may grow

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even wider, as nearly half of America's new jobs will require vocational training. But don't count on trade schools to bridge the chasm. They currently offer more programs for cosmetologists, radio and TV broadcasters, and casino dealers than for respiratory therapists and X-ray technicians, though the latter are among America's most undermanned occupations. And in the name of lean, mean, free-market education, the federal government graciously funds them all.

As the Department of Education crunches loan-default numbers, it overlooks the real bottom line: whether students get genuine, marketable skills for their billions in federally guaranteed grants and loans. With no safeguards on educational quality and little connection to labor market needs, the answer all too often is no. That brain drain has a higher psychic and economic price tag for America than any billion-dollar default.

Cinderella schools

Heffley & Brown Secretarial Schools. Rutledge College. Barclay Career Schools. The names may be cribbed from Burke's Peerage, but the longing is straight out of Dreiser: to grasp the bottom rungs of the bourgeoisie.

In the neat mauve-and-paisley waiting room of PTC Career Institute, D.C.'s largest trade school, a young woman nervously queries the receptionist. "Do you take people in the halfway house? I've heard some schools don't take people from the halfway house. . . ." And what, the woman asks, about her boyfriend, still asleep at noon? Wake him up and get him down here, advises the receptionist, kindly proffering a phone.

These days, as grocery stores and other institutions pack up and flee the center city, trade school fliers and friendly sales reps remain a constant of urban life. Yet the impulse behind such recruitment isn't altruism; it's economics. The poorer the student, the greater the amount of federal financial aid—which for some trade schools makes poverty the single most important criterion for admission.

Recruiters for D.C.'s Barclay schools use a Haines reverse telephone directory to make their quota. Flipping past Georgetown, Cleveland Park, and other well-appointed neighborhoods, they swiftly zero in on the slums. "You call 31st Street Southeast in the middle of the afternoon and hear "Gilligan's Island" in the background," says one agent, "and you know you've hit the jackpot."

Jackpot, indeed. While the number of traditional college students fell off during the eighties, trade school enrollment swelled as much as 13 percent a year. Thanks to 1988's federal Family Support Act, the figures for the nineties may be even higher, as states are forced to enroll 20 percent of their welfare clients in educational or job training by 1995 in order to retain federal public assistance.

To most observers, a booming trade school business seems like good news not just for the underclass, but for America, whose training gap has become a political cliché. Rectifying both social and economic imbalance was precisely what Congress had in mind when it welcomed proprietary schools into federal student aid programs back in the seventies—an educational reform made possible by a rare confluence of liberal sentiment and free-market infatuation. With a little federal funding, private schools would be able to train the noncollege workforce more cheaply and efficiently than logy government programs ever could. Paradoxically—as with today's celebrated school choice proposals—these "market" schools would also be fueled by a vast injection of public money. To the vestigial Great Society sensibility, restricting loans to four-year colleges was elitist. The catch-verb was "democratize."

"It was a great issue of educational access and civil rights," says Jeffrey Plaut, who recently studied New York state's private trade schools for the nonprofit group, Interface. "But they only got half of the equation. Government created a market for these schools by infusing hundreds of millions of dollars, but then stood back and allowed the industry to regulate itself. And now they wonder why it turned into such a disaster."

While the new cottage industry paid ex-Department of Education officials handsomely to help it pilot the shoals of federal loan programs, the feds deputized a fraud squad straight out of Mayberry: a handful of trade school "accrediting agencies" made up of, and largely funded by, trade school operators. (Evaluating Tennessee schools for one such agency was that educational arbiter Tommy Wayne Downs.) Having obtained a state license and having been recognized by his accrediting agency colleagues, a trade school owner could apply for eligibility for federal grants and loans—a complicated, time-consuming procedure with roughly the same results as a rubber stamp. Between '86 and '88, 97 percent of the 2,870 trade schools that asked for federal money ultimately got it—even though the Department of Education's inspector general later found 38 percent of them financially or administratively "deficient."

And what of *educationally* deficient? The feds can't say: in most cases, they've never even seen the schools. "Examination of educational quality . . . is not part of the certification process, and [the Department of Education] has no authority to make it so,"

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Inspector General James Thomas recently reassured the public. "Thus as long as an institution is financially strong and capable of administering Title IV programs, [the department] cannot deny participation even if educational programs lack merit."

Small wonder, then, that Florida's American Career Training Schools, a travel-agent and secretary training academy, spent 52 percent of its money on advertising and sales reps in 1989, and barely 2 percent on teacher salaries and class materials. Although the school's owners claimed 90 percent placement rates, a former financial aid officer recently testified that the real rate was closer to one or two in 10—and many of those successful graduates began their "careers" behind the night desk of Miami's Motel 6. All that for $43 million a year in federally guaranteed loans—a figure that amply covered the million-dollar salaries of the schools' top two "deans."

"Examination of educational quality . . . is not part of the certification process, and [the Department of Education] has no authority to make it so," DOE's Inspector General James Thomas recently reassured the public.

If that story scored a few local headlines, the hundreds of thousands of unsensational educational failures rarely do. Although industry groups claim that 81 percent of trade school graduates find work in their fields, that healthy return disintegrates in other, more independent studies. A 1989 New York City government analysis reported that, despite ample federal aid, only *4 percent* of disadvantaged trade school students were off the welfare rolls one year after their training. Even using the trade schools' own unverified numbers, another study by Interface discovered that less than a quarter of enrollees eventually found jobs in their field of study. Several researchers concede that trade schools offer students short-term economic gains, but long-term prospects look less certain. Norton Grubb of Berkeley's National Center for Research in Vocational Education recently completed the first long-term study of the sector. After 14 years, he found, trade school graduates showed no gain in income compared to people with basic high school diplomas. In fact, in some cases a trade school degree actually hurt income.

Behind those cold numbers, obviously, there's an awful lot of human carnage. Stephanie Percy-Garrett, a job placement counselor with D.C.'s Mitch Snyder Shelter for the Homeless, comes across more than her share every day. She remembers one well-groomed young graduate particularly well. The woman arrived at her interview on time, proudly bearing a diploma from PTC Career Institute, certifying her typing at 75+ wpm. "We said, great, fantastic. We shouldn't have any trouble placing her," Percy-Garrett recalls. "But then we asked her to take our own test. She sat down, stared at the keyboard, and said, 'OK—do I have to type all the periods and commas, too?'"

"A few bad apples"—that's been the trade schools' standard response to distasteful reports like Percy-Garrett's. But a mid-eighties General Accounting Office study of 1,600 schools counted up an orchard's worth, charging that more than two-thirds of trade schools "misrepresented" their placement rates, curricula, or student aid. Today, a phalanx of Department of Education reformers tinkers in the margins with default rates, branch campuses, and admissions testing to plug a few of the holes. What they're not fussing with is far more fundamental: whether or not the graduate knows enough about periods and commas to get a job.

During the eighties, educational "outcomes"—not the money spent on classroom time, but the *results* of that classroom time—became the central criterion for evaluating America's K-12 education. President Bush and dozens of governors now advocate tying teachers' pay raises to test scores and other measurable results. Outcomes are even more relevant in the vocational sector, where students study specialized, technical trades. Yet proprietary schools have consistently resisted those standards. To qualify for federal aid under current regulations, a trade school may have to keep a neat file of student loan records, but it doesn't have to prove it found its graduates a place in American business.

While that fact probably delights the owners of federally accredited broadcasting, bartending, and casino-dealing schools, it has discomfiting results in the marketplace. Last year, New York Telephone in-

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terviewed 57,000 applicants before unearthing 2,100 capable of performing an entry-level technical job. Where were all those potential electricians? In beauty school. In 1990, although New York government officials warned that the market was glutted, *more city residents used federal funds to study nail sculpting and haircutting than any other vocational subject.*

Even as civil rights and legal services advocates scream for radical trade school reform, trade school lobbyists raise the specter of inequity to protect the status quo. Hurt us, their argument goes, and you're bound to hurt the poor. A spokesman for PTC Career Institute puts it coyly: "We're a product of the population we serve." Since that population tends to fail in great numbers, it's unfair to penalize trade schools for trying to save a few. So fluent in the idiom of civil rights is the trade school lobby that one accrediting agency head recently compared a proposed reform to apartheid. The equity argument has had real currency in Congress over the years. It may have less in real life.

In 1990, more city residents used federal funds to study nail sculpting and haircutting than any other vocational subject.

The Washington Urban League's Information Processing Training Center sits a few miles from the U.S. Department of Education, but its expectations for the poor are a world apart. The IBM PCs and low teacher-student ratios would undoubtedly pass federal muster, but in director Effie Smith-Macklin's modest classrooms, what really stands out are the intangibles. Attendance mandatory. Achievement expected. No slack, no attitude allowed. Seven hours a day for six months, more than 80 students study "business English," word processing, and other secretarial skills inside a grubby, 80-year-old school, stopping only to go to the bathroom and eat lunch. There's no mauve, no paisley anywhere, but as Smith-Macklin tells her students, "This may be a raggedy building, but *you* decide what happens inside."

For the Training Center's students, the distinction between circumstance and possibility is apt, for virtually all of them fit the federal government's none-too-lenient definition of disadvantaged. Several have been homeless; most of the rest are what's known as the hardcore unemployed. And quite a few of them, oddly enough, are already graduates of D.C.'s private trade schools. "These are people who have considerable loans," clucks Smith-Macklin. "But they still aren't skilled enough to get a job." After six months under her tutelage, though, more than 85 percent go off to work for IBM, Mobil, defense contractors, and law firms.

Of course, scores of trade schools claim numbers like Smith-Macklin's. But unlike them, she has to back them up, because her program is funded by another federal program, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Inspired by the same market consciousness as the Department of Education's trade school plan and committed to the same privatization of training, JTPA shows what federal money can accomplish when it's tied firmly to results.

Serving tiny enclaves of disadvantaged youth, adults, displaced workers, Eskimos, and Indians across the country, JTPA makes for an unlikely vanguard. By contracting to the private sector, it trains workers at far less cost than even "market" schools. Six months' training at the Washington Urban League costs the government $4,000 per student. Tuition for a six-month course at a private trade school runs thousands of dollars more, for which more than 85 percent of students receive substantial federal aid. But that's just money. More important, in the seven years since its inception, JTPA's been surprisingly successful at training the poor to meet real labor needs. Every year, in every state, "private industry councils" made up of business executives, union officials, and community leaders decide what type of training is most needed in the community, using labor market information collected by state and local governments. Then community colleges, nonprofit agencies, public schools, businesses, and other institutions compete for contracts to train workers in those fields.

Though trade schools are eligible to compete for the $3 billion available through JTPA, most of them don't bother to apply. Why? Possibly because in most states at least 60 percent of adult JTPA graduates

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must find jobs at the end of their training (figures verified by state departments of labor) or the contractors lose a chunk of their money. When the high placement standards were first proposed, potential JTPA contractors raged, pointing to their clients and spouting culture-of-poverty rhetoric. Then surprise: they started hitting their targets. While states are free to lower their placement goals during recessions or a contractors' revolt, few have done so. Massachusetts, South Carolina, and other states have actually raised theirs.

A success story? Sort of. Today, JTPA operates on the margins, serving less than 5 percent of eligible disadvantaged adults, providing unsophisticated, short-term training, and watching its federal funding wither away. That's a lethargy that trickles down to contractors less dogged than Effie Smith-Macklin.

Instead of serving the stigmatized few, the market-wise, outcome-oriented JTPA should be a model for all federal vocational education—and could easily be, with a sturdier commitment from Congress. But in the long run, there's a level of accountability that even JTPA hasn't tackled: training *quality*—a word that implies more than simple, low-level placement. No government can mandate that contractors do what's right for their clients, providing superior training that prepares them for decent jobs. It can, however, instigate quality control so convincing that the private sector will come running for graduates of federally funded programs.

To make that absurd proposition a probability, one has to look away from JTPA to Germany, which places a premium on intensive noncollege training. With the help of business, union, and education leaders, the German government has developed national competency exams for several hundred technical, manufacturing, and clerical vocations—which may be one reason Germany, with a quarter of our population, nearly equaled us last year in exports. While many of America's "professional" licensing exams are a barely relevant barrier to entry (passing the bar, for instance, qualifies you to try capital cases and close real estate deals without testing to see whether you can do either), by its nature, vocational education allows for practical testing. If you can *demonstrate* your ability to read, spell, type, and use a computer, you can be a certified secretary. If you can run conduit, pull wire, and fathom the interplay between amps, volts, and watts, you can be an accredited entry-level electrician. And by extension, the feds should start a system under which, if you can successfully train those secretaries and electricians—whether you're the PTC Career Institute or the Urban League—you can get federal funds.

Radical as national trade-testing sounds, its advocates here include three former labor secretaries, the CEOs of Eastman Kodak and Xerox, union heads, top officials of the New York State Department of Education, leading economists, and the nonprofit National Center on Education and the Economy. Developing equitable, sensible tests will be a challenge, no question. But the results will reverberate—not simply by weeding lousy schools from federal programs, but by ensuring the quality of nearly half of the U.S. workforce.

Training our sights

The English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, bouncing from job to wretched job, once confided his despair to his diary: How difficult it was to locate that infinitesimal point where he and the world might intersect. As America slips into recession, helping 5 million members of the underclass find that nexus will be one of the federal government's toughest jobs. So many people searching, so little coordination. As Xerox chairman David Kearns recently put it, "This has the makings of a national disaster." Fortunately, as Congress reauthorizes the Higher Education Act this session, programs like JTPA offer the makings of a solution.

The chief argument against quality-controlled, market-conscious federal job training is money. It would be expensive. But real training is worth it, not just as a sop to the underclass, but as a boost to America's rank in the new economic order. Our competitor nations recognized the connection between job competence and national economic health decades ago, which is why their training is partly funded by levies on those who directly benefit from the results: employers. Today, American companies spend far less than their Japanese, German, and Korean counterparts on training noncollege employees—which means that while our competitors champion skill mastery, we create more dead-end jobs. A training tax on business would force companies to carry their share of the burden. Add those revenues to the billions of dollars already squandered on grants and outstanding federal loans made to unemployable trade school graduates, and you can salvage a lot of wasted potential.

Reinventing America's trade training will ultimately give American business a competent, competitive front line. But there's something even more important involved here. In America, dreams like the ones Tommy Wayne Downs sold shouldn't have to be lies. Continuing to countenance a broken trade school system sends an ugly message to the poor: Some people—even those who work to beat the odds—are simply born to lose. □

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Kicking the Oil Habit

How to get alternative fuel cars on the road. Lots of them. Right now.

by Peter Gray

For years I had been substance-dependent, and it was time to get out. The stuff had always made life easier—until the aftereffects kicked in. As friends warned me it would, it was starting to ruin my health. Sure, it was relatively cheap, but I could no longer dodge the fact that kids were dying so foreign cartels could feed my habit. I had to do something. Oil was ruining my life.

What I got my hands on was one answer to U.S. petroleum dependence—natural gas, a fuel that's cheap, clean, and domestically abundant [see "Energy Without Emirs," October 1990]. There I was, wind in my hair, tiger in my tank, driving a standard full-size Chrysler and enjoying as smooth a ride as Lee Iacocca ever promised. The only thing missing was the gasoline.

Any serious discussion of breaking our petroleum addiction has to focus on transportation. Vehicles drink nearly 12 million of the 18 million barrels we use daily, and most of that goes into cars, trucks, and buses. Transportation is 97 percent oil-dependent, while electricity generation is only 5 percent. Although oil use for purposes besides transportation has dropped 20 percent since the mid-seventies, vehicles have boosted their demand by about the same amount. As a result, we're back to the oil consumption peak of 1976, with less crude in the ground and little hope for stability in the major oil-rich countries. But we have the tools to get the oil-monkey off our backs—if only we'd choose to use them.

Of the contenders to replace oil, compressed natural gas and electricity are the most immediately promising. Both are cleaner than gasoline. Both are available now, without pie-in-the-sky technological advances. Neither poses the national security problems of petroleum. And when environmental effects are counted, both cost less. The trick is to identify the trans-

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portation niche that each can fill and then gradually begin displacing gasoline-powered vehicles. The ideal initial target group for converting to natural gas, for instance, is fleet vehicles—which consume 20 percent of our road transportation energy. That's about as much oil as we import from the Persian Gulf.

It was a bit of a letdown when I finally got to drive an automobile powered by natural gas. Out on the open road, I flipped a switch on the dash to go from gasoline to compressed natural gas (CNG) and . . . nothing happened. An instant's hesitation, and then the Chrysler drove as it had before. Or so it seemed. In fact, from the planet's perspective, the situation had changed radically. After all, the smog-producing components of my exhaust had suddenly dropped 80 percent.

Natural gas vehicles (NGVs) not only contribute a lot less to local smog than do gasoline or diesel vehicles, they also emit 25 percent less carbon dioxide, which means less risk of global warming. Because the fuel is so much cleaner than gasoline, vehicles running on it require less maintenance and fewer oil changes.

And this is no fantasy fuel; some 750,000 NGVs are already on the road, and doing quite nicely. Unfortunately, only 30,000 of them are in the U.S.—about one car in 6,000. Canada, with one-tenth of our population, has an NGV fleet two-thirds as large. Australia and Italy have 50 times as many NGVs per capita; New Zealand's proportion is 320 times as high as the U.S.'s. Those countries haven't wrecked their economies or deprived their citizens of the inalienable right to the thrill of the open road. With the help of NGVs, cleaning up the air and protecting the beaches, reducing the risk of global warming and keeping troops out of the Middle East can be achieved without drastically changing your life.

The fuel itself is 30 to 50 percent cheaper than gasoline, and likely to stay that way for at least a few more automobile lifetimes. Like the Chrysler I drove, nearly all NGVs now on the road have modified ("dual-fuel") gasoline engines. Adding compressed natural gas capability runs about $2,000, in part because it is done on a small custom scale. (The NGV I drove is owned by Washington Gas, which had to send the car to West Virginia for conversion.) In a typical family car, money saved on fuel could take eight years to pay for the retrofit. This isn't likely to be a big hit with the average consumer, although reduced maintenance costs would sweeten the deal. But several technologies now in development will improve the picture for NGVs. A "dedicated CNG engine" will get higher efficiency and performance by taking advantage of the 135 octane rating of natural gas. This higher efficiency will help close the gap in driving range between NGVs and conventional cars—CNG currently requires four times the fuel-storage volume as gasoline. Better fuel tanks should reduce weight and increase range.

You may agree that the warm feeling of doing a little extra for national security and the environment would more than balance any small differences in cost and convenience. But before you rush into anything, let me warn you of a little problem you'll run into 100-odd miles down the road. Have you ever seen a CNG filling station?

I have personally visited one-third of all the supposedly public CNG pumps in America: at the Amoco station at 9th and Pennsylvania in Southeast D.C. (the other two are in Colorado). The pump is a simple white box sporting Amoco's green-leaf CNG logo and two thin hoses. Because of an archaic utility regulation prohibiting resale, this D.C. outlet, which isn't yet operational, won't even be able to sell natural gas to the public. But surely the scarcity problem is fixable. When personal

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computers came out, there weren't too many stores where you could buy floppy disks, either. That didn't mean we should have given up on PCs.

The ABCs of NGVs

Converting to natural gas vehicles poses a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Detroit would be willing to optimize an NGV if there were a solid market for it, and mass production would eliminate the high cost of retrofits. Buyers would be attracted to its low operating costs—if they could readily refuel it. And gas station owners would install CNG compressors if there were enough demand to make that investment profitable. But no one will make the first move.

The key to breaking this gridlock is to begin with cars that travel local routes and can be centrally fueled. "Fleet vehicle," the catch-all category, includes buses, delivery vans, garbage trucks, taxicabs, even rental cars—in all, about 10 percent of American vehicles. These vehicles consume some 20 percent of road transportation energy, because they log double the annual mileage of the average family car (which means that retrofits will pay off twice as quickly). The conversion sequence could work like this:

1) Start with government-owned or -operated cars, buses, and trucks that run on regular schedules. Put inexpensive overnight-fill compressors at their central parking lots. (Off-hours fueling makes better use of gas pipelines, too, by leveling out demand.) In Texas, one-third of new transit and private fleet purchases in metropolitan areas must be alternative fuel vehicles by 1994; that number will go up to 50 percent in 1996, and 90 percent by 1998. The more cities that follow Texas's model, the cheaper conversion will be for all.

2) Convert private fleets of company cars, delivery vans, and taxis. (Imagine what this could do for New York City's air quality.)

3) Switch longer-range government vehicles to natural gas.

4) Convert most rental cars to natural gas. Customers who rent for local use could get discounts for renting NGVs. After all, the majority of clients at National, Hertz, and Avis are businessmen who tend to use their cars only to get around town (a National employee in D.C. estimated that the average businessman puts only 20 miles on the odometer). And because 85 percent of all rentals are dropped off where they were picked up, many rental sites could be easily converted to centralized compressed gas fueling.

By step four, there'd be enough demand to support some private filling stations in big cities, and automakers would be producing engines to take advantage of CNG's greater efficiency. The cost advantages of NGVs would then become compelling to commuters, especially if air regulations cracked down on traditional fuels at the same time. Once this snowball effect gets big enough, perhaps Americans will be able to drive coast-to-coast in natural gas vehicles . . . which means we'd finally catch up to the Canadians, who already can.

Silent running

While we're waiting for these natural gas filling stations to sprout up, we can begin switching to electric vehicles (EVs). EVs are quiet, rechargeable virtually anywhere, and clean. Even when you take into account the emissions caused by making the electricity they use, EVs contribute less to local smog than gasoline-powered cars. Using coal-fired power, they produce slightly more carbon dioxide, but 90 percent less when they use nuclear, and 100 percent less with renewable energy. Think about it: streets full of softly humming vehicles, not a tailpipe in sight.

An EV drives pretty much like any other car, except that the brakes feel odd. That's because when you step on the brake pedal, the motor becomes a generator, pumping energy back into the batteries instead of dumping it overboard as waste heat. When the motor is not needed to push the car (at a stoplight, for instance), it simply shuts off like a light. For environmental reasons, this feature makes EVs more attractive in traffic-congested areas. They'd be a godsend in Southern California, where some 20 percent of gasoline is burned in cars stuck in traffic, getting zero miles per gallon.

By plugging an on-board charger into a socket at home, you could juice up your EV overnight for about half the cost of the gasoline it would take to drive as far. But although EVs have been around for a century, they are still rare creatures, numbering less than 10,000 worldwide. Why? Probably because their range stinks: I recently drove an electric "G-Van" owned by Southern California Edison—a smooth and quiet ride, but the van could go only 60 miles before it needed to recharge for several hours.

But if you apply a little common sense and consider the statistics, this problem starts to shrink. We all know two-car families—in fact, there are about 40 million U.S. households, and more every year, with two or more cars. Clearly, in many of these households—more common sense—the family tends to rely on one car for trips around town, another for trips on the open road. Now consider this fact: The average commute to work by car—round-trip—is only *10 miles*. And it takes place at an average speed of 31 mph. For that trip, you don't exactly need the Batmobile.

EVs can also be used commercially. Although the

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G-Van is simply a low-tech variant of a vehicle built to run on oil—the gasoline engine, transmission, exhaust system, and radiator have been stripped out and replaced with one ton of batteries and an electric motor—it is ideal for predictable, short-haul urban driving. The electric van would cost about five percent less to own and operate than a gasoline-powered one. That's why the British have used electric delivery vans for years, and why electric trucks are hauling trash in, of all places, Saudi Arabia.

Put one EV in each multi-car family, throw in all those short-range fleet cars and vans, and you're talking about a hefty slice of the market. In fact, General Motors is aiming to have a marketable EV on the road by mid-decade. With the help of Paul MacCready, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers' "Engineer of the Century," GM has already built a prototype high-performance electric sportscar, regrettably called "Impact." The Impact has a top speed of 110 mph and a range of 120 miles. GM is currently touting Impact research in television spots. Through more aerodynamic designs, higher pressure tires, and an improved power train, MacCready thinks we can double auto energy efficiency without loss of safety or performance. Improved efficiency not only cuts oil demand directly, but it also strengthens the case for lower-density alternatives like EVs by easing the problems of energy storage and range.

Guilt- and Gulf-free

Aside from waging war in the Gulf, the Bush energy strategy should include more than just lobbying for oil pumping in environmentally sensitive areas. That sort of pumping will meet one year of national demand at best, while leaving the U.S. with less in reserve for the next crisis. If, as Bush suggested it would in his State of the Union Address, the administration focuses in the next year on the need for a credible energy policy, here are some more imaginative steps it might consider:

➤Consumer Information: as in labeling, for example. If we can require labels on cigarette packs and beer bottles, we can certainly do so on automobiles. Sure, we have EPA mileage ratings, but they run 15 percent higher than reality, and they aren't much use in buying decisions. A smarter system would put a statement on each sticker such as: "This car will cost about $W per year to own and operate." To better inform more conscientious consumers, the label might add, "It will do X, Y, and Z to the environment." A lot of us would discover that driving can be much cheaper than it is now—and guilt-free at the same time.

➤Get Fuel Prices Right: Until the price of each commodity reflects the side effects of its use, we won't get the full benefits of a free market. Since our troops are presumably not dying to protect OPEC's right to overcharge us for oil, let's assume that when the war ends, oil will finally trade at its market price. All energy sources should then be taxed in proportion to the costs they impose on society through pollution, resource depletion, and security risks. Estimates of these costs don't have to be perfect to be better than what we use now.

➤Reward as well as Penalize Automakers: A sliding scale of tough penalties on dirty gas guzzlers balanced by rebates for the leanest and cleanest would tell Detroit and Japan what to do. We can then let them figure out how to do it.

➤Support Efficiency and Renewables Research: Department of Energy efficiency programs of the early eighties are yielding thousands of dollars in direct energy savings for each research dollar spent. In the long run, putting money into efficiency R&D will do as much to protect and improve the American way of life as investing in more Patriot missiles.

"We are doing everything we can to guarantee . . . that there will be an adequate supply of hydrocarbons," declared George Bush during the early days of the Gulf crisis—in retrospect, perhaps the most chilling comment on American preparations for war. Once the dust settles in the desert, maybe Americans will realize that there are better ways to get their hydrocarbons than by fighting for them, and that there are better ways to get to work in the morning than by driving a gas guzzler. Oil may have helped make the United States great, but it's time to start letting go. □

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Trivia Pursuit

Too much of America's research money goes to studies nobody wants to read

by David P. Hamilton

Like most academic libraries, the Gelman Library at George Washington University is an impressive place if you're easily awed by thinking about the accumulated weight of human knowledge. Although the building itself, a squat seven-story slab of concrete and glass, won't win any architecture prizes, it does possess a certain solemnity. Just inside is a room filled with the modern equivalent of the card catalog—flashing terminals before which anxious students are busily compiling lists of the books they need for footnotes in their current research paper. Below, the basement holds several million pounds of government documents; above, three floors are devoted to classrooms and offices, while two more hold the library's collection of 1.5 million books. Sandwiched between offices and the stacks is the periodicals floor, which holds both the popular magazine collection and perhaps as many as 10,000 scholarly journals—the published record of the world's past and present academic research.

Just standing in the presence of so much painstakingly assembled research is humbling. But once you begin to look with a critical eye through the material kept there, some of your awe might begin to wane. Pass through the current periodical section, and you'll find titles of "scholarly" research journals like *School Food Service Journal*, *Bee World*, and *The Journal of Band Research*. Pick up one of these journals and actually try to *read* it, and you can make an even scarier discovery: that an unfortunately large percentage of what passes as the bedrock of academic achievement more closely resembles intellectual quicksand. For instance, the literature chronicling recent research in the social sciences includes the following:

➤"An Empirical Methodology for the Ethical Assessment of Marketing Phenomena Such as Casino Gambling" (*Journal of the Academy*

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of Marketing), in which University of Detroit professor Oswald Mascarenhas explains not only that gamblers are more favorably disposed toward gambling than non-gamblers ("teleological and deontological justifications of casino gambling were decisively low"), but that people look more favorably on gambling if they think they can get rich at it ("distributive justice related conditional acceptance of casino gambling was higher").

➤"Securing the Middle Ground: Reporter Formulas in '60 Minutes' " (*Critical Studies in Mass Communication*), in which University of Michigan professor Richard Campbell analyzes 154 of the show's episodes and concludes that its meaning lies in "story formulas" in which reporters "construct a mythology for Middle America." Wait, there's more—"60 Minutes" has the power "to transform and deform experience, to secure a middle ground for audiences, and to build unified meanings in and for a pluralistic culture." (And you thought it was just a news program.)

➤"Autonomy, Interdependence, and Social Control: NASA and the Space Shuttle *Challenger*" (*Administrative Science Quarterly*), a 32-page dissection of the NASA mistakes leading to the *Challenger* accident, after which Boston College professor Diane Vaughan concludes that "this case study does not generate the sort of comparative information on which definitive policy statements can be made." Those sorts of judgments, it turns out, require the systematic assembly of data on "the relationship between autonomy, interdependence, and social control in diverse types of regulatory settings." Even then, "difficulties in measuring variation in autonomy and interdependence" will make policy decisions "imprecise." And "our lack of skill at converting research findings into diagnostic recommendations for organizations" will also hinder the search for concrete solutions.

It might seem unfair to pick on the social sciences, which have long suffered by comparison with the more glamorous and better-funded "hard" sciences (physical and life science, medicine, and engineering). But the reputation of social science as a haven for work that tells us 1) nothing we need to know, or 2) nothing that we didn't know already, has resulted at least in part from the accessibility of the subjects that social scientists like to study. It's easy to dismiss Richard Campbell's study of "60 Minutes" as gasbaggery if you've watched the show. It's much harder to make a similar judgment about work in the hard sciences, such as an AIDS study published a few years ago in which researchers mistakenly claimed to have found a viral cousin to HIV, unless you've spent years doing similar research yourself. Even so, there are a number of good reasons to suspect that things are about as bad in the hard sciences as in social science, even if it's harder to figure out just from reading the published studies.

For instance, although scientists like to portray themselves as inquiring, dynamic researchers who strike out wherever their curiosity leads them, in reality most of the same criticisms levied against "pack journalism" in the political world can just as easily be aimed at "pack research." In 1986, when IBM researchers in Switzerland discovered a ceramic that became superconducting at much higher temperatures than previously thought possible, material scientists all over the world piled onto the superconductivity bandwagon. Rustum Roy, a material science researcher at the Pennsylvania State University, told me about his experience as a session chairman at a meeting of the Materials Research Society: "We received 500 papers on superconductivity, and I told the conference organizers that we could eliminate 90 percent without hurting the session. They agreed, but said, 'Then [the authors]

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won't come to the meeting!' "

Similarly, in the field of vaccinology, researchers for the past 10 years have devoted themselves to making what are called "subunit vaccines," work that has next to nothing to do with producing vaccines for real people. "Much of this research is very pedestrian," says MIT molecular biologist Richard Young, who did vaccine development himself until he became disgusted with the field. In 10 years, only one subunit vaccine has ever protected people against disease—a failure that Young attributes to vaccinologists' reluctance to really dig into the complex immunological systems that govern the body's response to disease.

This is not to say that academics are all stodgy, incompetent researchers who do derivative research while hiding their inadequacies with specialized jargon, statistics, and a lousy command of English. Obviously, a great many scholars in fields ranging from psychology to immunology to chemistry do make significant contributions, both to scientific understanding and to society at large. But many of their colleagues are falling down on the job, or unable to do it in the first place. And what's worse is that while they're stumbling, the government is picking up most of the tab.

With the exception of a few iconoclasts, however, no one spends much time figuring out what, exactly, society reaps from its substantial investment in academic research, or whether it might be better served by distributing government resources differently. Yet such questions bear asking. The public investment in research is huge—almost $16 billion in direct federal, state, and tax-deductible industrial support. As ostensibly nonprofit organizations, universities save billions more in exemptions from taxes on patent income and property. And although the success stories of academic research are undeniable—advances in computing technology, a variety of medical treatments ranging from vaccines to cancer therapies, and a better understanding of the geophysical forces that cause earthquakes, to name a few—these successes, and the foundation of basic research that has made them possible, represent only a tiny fraction of all the research performed each year. Beyond the tip of this iceberg, we aren't even beginning to get our money's worth.

Smoke or mirrors?

You won't get far with such concerns if you approach the guardians of the research establishment, of course. "Overall, the United States has the best research universities and graduate education in the world," says Robert Rosenzweig, president of the Association of American Universities, the Washington representative for 56 American and two Canadian research universities. Rosenzweig fairly well summarizes the conventional wisdom of the American research establishment: We're doing just fine, thank you. And a quick statistical look at the nation's research effort helps explain the smugness. In 1988 there were 356 accredited "research universities" supporting about 250,000 professors in some 275 disciplines ranging from applied mathematics to sociology to art history and criticism. Just over 1 million students toil away in the nation's graduate schools, and 34,000 of them receive doctoral degrees each year.

For Rosenzweig and others, there's just one fly in the ointment—researchers aren't getting as much money as they should. Despite unprecedented growth in federal research budgets over the past 10 years, complaints about a "funding crisis" in American research are picking up steam. Leon Rosenberg, dean of the Yale University School of Medicine, is one of the leading doomsayers. "Our nation's health research program is burning," he announced at an Institute of Medicine meeting last June. "For those of you in Washington who are unable to see the flames, I say, wake up and open your eyes. For those of you who can't smell the smoke, I say, please blow your nose and inhale again."

In fairness, Rosenberg's complaints can't be dismissed out of hand: Biomedical research costs have risen faster than inflation, and it is harder now than ever before for young scientists to get funding to start their own labs. But at heart, the idea of a research funding "crisis" borders on the fraudulent. American science is drawing more money than ever before from the federal government, and even the budget convulsions last year left research spending growing faster than just about any other segment of the federal budget. The National Institutes of Health (NIH), for instance—the primary source of biomedical funding, and the target of Rosenberg's campaign—has grown by an average of 8.1 percent a year for the last five years.

Larger increases in federal research spending are politically unlikely in the future. But even if increases were feasible, it's not clear they would be a good idea. Within scientific circles, horror stories of studies rendered useless by bad methodologies, improper uses of statistics, shoddy data, sloppiness, or fraud are legion. "There are so [many] bad statistics," says Gabriel Weinreich, an acoustical physicist at the University of Michigan. "It's not a minor violation—it's really rather horrifying."

"I've never met a scientist who didn't believe that 80 percent of the scientific literature was nonsense,"

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says Walter Stewart, an NIH researcher with a long-standing interest in the integrity of scientific research. Richard Young agrees: "I frequently have to go into the 'deep literature'—those journals I no longer have time to read on a daily basis—and it is often a waste of time." Young adds that 80 percent of scientific articles could "just vanish" without affecting the scientific enterprise.

Although hard evidence for such assertions is difficult to come by, there are a few indirect indications that such criticisms are, if anything, conservative. One way to measure the impact of someone's research is through "citation analysis," a process which basically amounts to counting the number of times a published study is footnoted in other scientific articles. Such analyses are far from foolproof: some scientists are unscrupulous and don't cite their colleagues' papers, while others can be influenced by a study they forgot to credit. Even with these caveats in mind, however, the results of a recent citation analysis are rather startling. The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia that keeps a large citation database, recently found that among papers published between 1981 and 1985 (in the hard and social sciences), just over half were not cited *at all* for five years after they were published.

Pass through the current periodical section, and you'll find titles of "scholarly" research journals like *School Food Service Journal*, *Bee World*, and *The Journal of Band Research*.

That's a pretty stunning figure—but it gets worse. An earlier ISI study considered papers that were cited once or more, and found that only 46 percent of such papers were cited more than once. Combining the two figures (an admittedly imprecise calculation, but one that provides some sense of the problem's magnitude) leads to the conclusion that about 81 percent of all the published work in the sciences has next to no impact on the work of other scientists. And even that isn't the end of the story. ISI only indexes roughly 10 percent of all journals—this sample included about 4,500. "The conventional wisdom in the field is that 10 percent of the journals get 90 percent of the citations," says ISI analyst David Pendlebury. Extrapolating the preceding trends into the bottom tier of journals in another crude calculation suggests that perhaps only three scientific articles out of every hundred are worth reading at all.

Why do so many unremarkable articles—which usually reflect equally unremarkable academic studies—end up in print? The answer lies in three famous words: publish or perish. And the publish-or-perish principle is firmly rooted in scientific competition for grants and positions—a process exacerbated by the practice of granting faculty members lifetime appointments. Originally intended to protect the freedom of academics to study controversial topics, tenure has devolved into a seven-year review of junior faculty members that encourages useless publication in three ways. First, tenure candidates must convince their departmental peers that their research is up to the standards of the field, and the easiest way to do that is to amass a pile of impenetrable research articles, most of which are never read. "It wasn't like the ultimate outcome was scientific knowledge," said one researcher of her work at a Georgetown University medical school lab. "It was, like, just publish whatever you can to get more grants and more money." Or take the experience of University of Michigan President James Duderstadt. "As someone who has to read a couple of hundred casebooks a year for tenure decisions, I can say it varies significantly from discipline to discipline," Duderstadt says. "But it is clearly most out of control in the medical sciences, where if a person doesn't have over 100 publications listed in [his] biography you think there's something wrong with [him]." Unfortunately, Duderstadt isn't exaggerating.

Second, the tenure process creates a need to win the approval of academic peers and tends to reinforce conventional wisdom in a field, stifling innovative research. Surprisingly, for a community of supposedly open-minded scholars, academics generally prefer not to be challenged in their views. After reviewing the research on scholarly publication, University of

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Pennsylvania marketing professor J. Scott Armstrong observed several common themes that led him to devise an "author's formula." By this formula, authors wishing to increase the chances of getting their research published should "1) *not* pick an interesting topic; 2) *not* challenge existing beliefs; 3) *not* obtain surprising results; 4) *not* use simple methods; 5) *not* provide full disclosure; and 6) *not* write clearly." Similarly, when Douglas Peters of the University of North Dakota and Steve Ceci of Cornell University found that psychology journals tended to accept articles based on the perceived status of the authors—regardless of the contributions of the paper itself—their study was rejected by the prestigious journals *Science* and *American Psychologist* before it found a home in a journal devoted to controversial topics.

Finally, according to David Helfand, chairman of the astronomy department at Columbia University, tenure "can exclude productive, energetic scholars from the system, maintain unproductive, unmotivated teachers in our universities, and discourage our best young minds from pursuing academic careers." Helfand argues that tenured job security attracts too many scholars seeking a respite from performance reviews and often "locks in" whole generations of academics—many of them untalented—during periodic "hiring frenzies" brought on by the retirement of faculty hired during the last such wave. The resulting mediocrity of the professoriate goes a long way toward explaining the generally dismal state of academic research. "We are selecting those with the greatest need for security, and the least confidence in their ability to hold a job on merit," he says. (Helfand, by the way, is virtually unique among academics for rejecting his own tenure offer nine years ago in favor of a five-year renewable contract [see "I Turned Down Tenure," June 1986].)

Proliferate or perish

Less substandard work would make it out of the academy, of course, if there were fewer outlets within which to be published. There are more than 30,000 journals in the hard sciences alone, and well over 100,000 journals for all fields. Among the publications indexed by ISI—and remember, this is only about 10 percent of everything in print—are 312 titles in psychology, 73 in sociology, 369 in mathematics, 126 in botany, 293 in literature, 61 in food and science technology, 12 in ergonomics, 55 in library science, and 18 in parasitology. The amount of repetition is mind-numbing: anesthesiologists can choose between *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, *Anesthesiology*, and *Anesthesiology Clinics of North America*; psychologists have the option of publishing in *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *Psychosomatics*, and *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*. And even ISI indexes such out-of-the-mainstream journals as the *Annals of Saudi Medicine*, the *Ethiopian Medical Journal*, and the *Journal of the University of Kuwait—Science* (whose publication is, presumably, temporarily suspended).

As a result, it's hardly surprising that a sufficiently determined researcher can get his study, no matter how flawed it may be, into print somewhere. In fact, in one of the famous frauds of science, a medical researcher named Elias Alsabti published nearly 60 of his colleagues' old articles in obscure journals under his own name. Nobody noticed for almost three years, and even then the fraud was discovered only because Alsabti asked a colleague to review a paper that still contained clear references to the real author's identity.

It's fair to argue that journal publishers are merely responding to demand. But there would hardly be so many journals if there wasn't money to support them—and that money comes almost wholly from the public. Many journals are put out by professional societies, like the American Chemical Society, which enjoy the advantages of nonprofit status. These societies fund their publishing operations through a combination of advertising and membership dues—the latter paid largely out of government research grants. But most journals—85 percent, by some estimates—are distributed by commercial firms that usually make a healthy profit off government largess.

In addition to whatever advertising revenue they can scrape up, commercial journals thrive on subscription rates nearly twice those of nonprofit journals, mostly paid by university libraries whose operating costs are largely covered by the government. As if that weren't enough, many commercial journals resemble vanity presses by making researchers pay for the privilege of seeing their articles in print. The highly regarded commercial biology journal *Cell*, for instance, charges researchers $15 a page to publish papers which often run 15 or 20 pages. Of course, page charges are usually paid out of government grants, too.

Some academics claim that the proliferation of journals and studies is merely evidence of a healthy scholastic enterprise. But, spurred on by all the bogus publishing opportunities, academics have become so specialized that they can sometimes barely talk to their counterparts, much less students or their colleagues in other disciplines. "We have created a faculty of scholars frequently so narrow in their studies and specialized in their scholarship that they are simply incapable of teaching introductory courses," William Shaefer, a professor of English at UCLA, told *U.S. News and World Report*. James Trefil and

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Robert Hazen, two George Mason University science professors and the authors of the new book *Science Matters: Achieving Scientific Literacy*, recently found that in a group of 24 physicists and geologists, only three could explain the difference between DNA and RNA—a fundamental piece of information in the life sciences. And those three did research in areas where the information is a professional necessity.

The situation has gotten so bad that even the normally lethargic academic establishment is waking up. Some universities, led by the Harvard Medical School, are beginning to limit the number of papers they'll accept from faculty members up for promotion or tenure, as is the National Science Foundation. The idea is to discourage "salami science," the practice of breaking research into the "lowest publishable units." Some institutions—particularly state universities, where "publication is seen as the road to respectability," in the words of Harvard education professor Vito Perrone—are likely to resist. "More often these days, publication is not regarded as a way of communicating knowledge, but of promoting faculty," says Armstrong.

"I've never met a scientist who didn't believe that 80 percent of the scientific literature was nonsense," says an NIH researcher.

Sturgeon's law

Although there's a significant amount of money wasted on useless research, the financial cost is only part of the reason to be concerned. It's worth remembering that every hour faculty members spend conducting experiments, taking surveys, or "deconstructing" *Jane Eyre* is an hour they're not spending with students. Education has become a bottom-drawer priority for most academics. "You simply don't get rewarded for teaching students," says Robert Collins, an English professor at Florida Atlantic University. "Spending time with students is suicide in this competitive atmosphere." Surveys reveal that the average number of hours faculty spend in the classroom each week has fallen from 10.5 in 1980 to only 8.7 in 1989. By contrast, faculty at research and doctorate-granting institutions now spend an average of 19.3 hours a week on research-related activities.

This suggests that anything that shrinks the amount of time and energy devoted to marginal research would have to be an improvement. The research establishment, of course, is resistant to the very idea. When I asked him how much academic research activity is actually useful, the Association of American Universities's Robert Rosenzweig shied away from the question. "Any guess I could make would surely underestimate its value," he says. While it's indisputable that "some research results are less interesting than others," it's "difficult to tell in advance which bets will turn out successful, and which won't; I can't think of a better way to operate the system than by having the people involved judge what's the best line of inquiry. No one's come up with a better system yet."

Maybe not. But Rosenzweig's answer might be called the Sturgeon's Law defense, in honor of the maxim—credited to the late writer Theodore Sturgeon—that "90 percent of anything is crap." In other words, since we can't figure out in advance who will have the bright ideas, we'd better fund *everybody*. The price—nine mediocre researchers for every brilliant scholar—is one society had better just shoulder. This argument suits legions of mediocre academic researchers just fine. But it's not exactly a guide for a defensible public policy.

Presumably, Rosenzweig thinks the alternative to the current system would be some draconian setup whereby a panel of bureaucrats attempts to judge whether research into the immune system of rats is more worthy of federal money than high-energy physics. There are a number of enthusiasts for just this approach; Drexel University science historian David Noble suggests that democratic control of research funding would go a long way toward asserting the needs of society over the often misplaced priorities of scientists and other academics. But political control of science has an unhappy history, one filled with horrors such as T. D. Lysenko's fraudulent crop

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genetics in the Soviet Union and the barbaric medical experimentation of Josef Mengele in Nazi Germany. Instead, it might be useful to consider ways of improving the quality of research by eliminating the perverse incentives that skew the present system.

The federal government is in a unique position to pressure universities to change, thanks to the leverage provided by the research grants it parcels out to institutions. It's not widely known outside the research community, but universities actually collect a fair amount of money from these grants through indirect "overhead costs" ostensibly related to utilities and upkeep of research facilities. At Stanford, which has the highest indirect cost rate in the country, a $100,000 research grant actually costs the government $178,000—$100,000 to cover the researcher's salary, his graduate students, and equipment, and $78,000 for the university's purposes. (Stanford is also currently under investigation for inflating its reported costs—less an argument for cutting back such reimbursements across the board than for letting federal auditors keep a closer eye on the money.) As a result, universities have every incentive to comply with whatever strings the government decides to attach to their money. The success of this approach has already been demonstrated—NIH, for instance, promulgated a set of guidelines for research practices and the handling of misconduct allegations.

Class consciousness

One obvious reform would be to have all research funding agencies—NIH, the Department of Defense, NASA, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Energy—follow the National Science Foundation's lead and limit the number of papers applicants can include with their grant applications. But the agencies can go one step further, and require institutions that take federal money to do likewise in their promotion and tenure decisions. By removing the incentive to publish as many papers as possible in the traditional seven-year race for tenure, tenure committees would encourage professors to concentrate on producing only the best papers possible.

Similarly, it wouldn't hurt for funding agencies to be more aggressive about the extent to which they reimburse library costs—a strategy that could help indirectly cut back on the number of journals in circulation. After all, who needs 138 journals of economics? Right now, only those economists seeking a home for the article no one else will print. By cutting back on the number of journals carried by libraries and subscribed to by researchers, the government can stop subsidizing the useless sectors of the academic publishing industry.

These simple measures could go a long way toward curbing the more flagrant failings of the current research system. In the long run, however, more systemic change is needed. Redirecting the energies of the academy away from self-promoting activity and back toward its primary goals—educating and advancing the state of knowledge—will require fundamental changes in academic culture. And the initiative for such change will have to come from the universities themselves.

Would-be reformers could do worse than to look into a recent report by Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Entitled *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, it begins with the startling fact that 60 percent of today's faculty believe that promotion should be based *primarily* on teaching ability rather than research prowess. At research universities, a smaller—but still significant—21 percent of faculty agree that current priorities are scrambled. Everett Ladd, a professor at the University of Connecticut, told Boyer that the emphasis on research and publication is "seriously out of touch with what faculty actually do and want to do."

In order to allow professors to bloom as teachers, Boyer makes a series of simple, yet sensible, recommendations. Universities should consider a broad range of writing in evaluating their faculty—everything from traditional research articles to textbooks and popular writing, such as the books and magazine articles of Stephen Jay Gould. They could also set guidelines for evaluating other scholarly contributions, such as the development of educational software or audiovisual materials. The control academic departments hold over promotions would necessarily be diminished, since Boyer also quite sensibly recommends rewarding interdisciplinary scholarship. Three tiers of teaching evaluations—self-assessment, student evaluations, and peer reviews—should also be incorporated into promotion decisions. (Despite lip service to the importance of teaching, few academic departments these days really consider teaching ability to be on the same plane as grant-getting and publishing. "It's true that a person with a good teaching record and a mediocre to poor research record will not be promoted [at MIT]," says Gene Brown, MIT's dean of science. But Brown adds that a mediocre teacher with an outstanding research record probably would get tenure.)

If universities really want to do something about improving the quality of research, they had better pay attention to suggestions like Boyer's. The crisis in academic research is real, even if it's not the one that critics such as Yale's Leon Rosenberg like to complain about. Spending more money on research isn't the answer. Spending it smarter is. □

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The Senate's Lame Doves

Why they failed to stop the war

by James Bennet

Those who spent a large part of the days leading up to January 16 in arguments over whether the U.S. should go to war with Iraq sooner, later, or not at all—arguments that flared up like grease fires in the middle of previously pleasant conversations around the dinner table, on the phone, in bars—may be surprised to learn of the one forum that managed to stay above the fray: the United States Senate. Somehow, both on the Senate floor and off it, the members of the greatest deliberative body in the world pretty much avoided getting dragged into messy debates with each other about the efficacy of sanctions, the validity of the Munich analogy, the staying power of the coalition.

This is not to say that senators didn't dig deep into their own souls, agonizing over what Robert Byrd, for one, called the most important vote of his 39-year congressional career. In fact, it's when you assume that most senators did agonize, did call upon their years of experience and their gut instincts in reaching their decisions, that their failure to try to guide others to the mountaintop seems most odd. When you further consider what was at stake—as Dale Bumpers declared, "The need for thoughtful, sensible debate has never, never been greater"—this failure begins to seem not merely odd, but outrageous.

From Thursday, January 10, through Saturday the 12th, Congress met to consider whether to grant George Bush the authority to take the country to war once the UN Security Council's deadline expired. Those days are widely regarded as having restored much of the faded luster of both houses. David Broder summed up that view, writing, "One thing on which everyone could agree . . . was that Congress—that familiar whipping boy—had dealt with the issue of authorizing the use of force in a manner befitting the gravity of the

James Bennet is an editor of The Washington Monthly. *Research assistance was provided by Elliott Beard and Sean O'Sullivan.*

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subject. The weekend debate was civil and somber, always serious and often eloquent." Certainly, in the Senate, it was somber, serious, and eloquent. And no doubt it was civil. But by any reasonable standard, it was not debate.

The curious antidebate tenor of the proceedings was established on day one. There was a sharp, promising exchange between Senators Paul Sarbanes and Arlen Specter over whether Secretaries Dick Cheney and James Baker had declared that sanctions had failed. Joe Biden took the floor to make his prepared statement, but Tom Harkin of Iowa, evidently excited by his colleagues' argument, asked Biden for 30 seconds to raise a couple of related points. Here's how the ensuing colloquy appears in the *Congressional Record*. Harkin began enthusiastically:

> Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, again, I was hoping we might get into these kinds of colloquies on the floor. I know senators want to give their speeches and express their views on this issue, but I hope that we will have enough time to be able to engage in these kinds of colloquies on the Senate floor to ferret out information that is false or inaccurate, or whatever, and correct the record, that sort of thing.
>
> I want to respond to a couple of things that the distinguished senator from Pennsylvania [Specter] said, for whom I have the greatest respect.
>
> Mr. DANFORTH. Mr. President, a parliamentary inquiry. Who has the floor?
>
> The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senator from Delaware.
>
> Mr. DANFORTH. I object to the senator from Iowa making speeches on the time of the senator from Delaware.
>
> The PRESIDING OFFICER. The unanimous consent was made and, without objection, it was agreed to.
>
> Mr. DANFORTH. Mr. President, what was the request?
>
> The PRESIDING OFFICER. For the senator from Iowa to be recognized for 30 seconds.
>
> Mr. DANFORTH. How much of that time remains?
>
> The PRESIDING OFFICER. The 30 seconds have expired. The senator from Delaware is recognized.
>
> Mr. BIDEN. . . .

Oh, well. Thus swatted down, Harkin, who together with Brock Adams had bravely challenged the majority leader to get the debate scheduled in the first place, never had the bad manners to try to mix it up on the floor again. The Sarbanes-Specter exchange was one of only two animated back-and-forths between two senators in the three days of speeches (the other came Friday morning, between Specter and Jeff Bingaman). The absence of debate worried some of the participants. "One of the concerns that this senator has is that in the course of the debate today, there have not been very many senators on the floor and there has not been the kind of exchange which I think a matter of this gravity deserves," said Specter on Thursday. ". . . I am hoping we can get into this question in terms of discussion with the senators who are supporting the so-called Mitchell resolution. . . ."

But of the colloquies that took place in the subsequent days, most were intended to bolster the original speaker; those that were critical of the speaker's points never got very far. For example, consider Harkin's next foray into colloquy, on Friday. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, one of the senators said to be undecided earlier in the week, had declared in his statement, "I think the Nunn approach of a sustained use of sanctions is the way to go." Nevertheless, he felt that the president had yoked the nation to his policy and it was too late to back out. You might have expected someone to get up and vigorously press a point Biden made the day before, that "when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging." Instead, Harkin noted that during the Nunn hearings, General David Jones said that drawing down some of our troops and moving to a rotation policy would not be perceived as a sign of weakness.

> Mr. JOHNSTON. I would observe I agree with General Jones, but I can tell you the president of the United States does not.
>
> Mr. HARKIN. I tend to associate myself with the senator's remarks. Thank you.

That's debate? Right after Harkin's remark, Sam Nunn launched into his floor speech, which was very convincing—except that he started out by surrendering: "[I]f the Nunn-Mitchell-Boren-Byrd resolution gets 20 votes, we are going to add one vote from the senator from Louisiana who is with us in spirit." That seems like a pretty poor substitute for getting him to join in the flesh.

In the three days of "debate," there were three colloquies on the floor that engaged four or more senators. One of these—the high point in those three days—occurred after Nunn spoke, when two senators (Specter and John Warner) challenged him on various issues, while one (Donald Riegle) asked him to expand on a point he had raised. The other two arguments weren't about sanctions, or Saddam, or the alliance with Syria. They were both about Senate procedure: who was going to speak when. For the usually pugnacious Barbara Mikulski, of all people, that

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was how it should be: "Then there are those saying: Where is the debate? When are they going to get into an argument?. . . Mr. President, that is not the way this body is conducting itself. I am proud to have been part of this discussion that I have heard. I see that my colleagues here do not want to argue with other senators."

No one would deny that many senators' speeches were wise and moving. But they were also often flatly contradictory. And since the senators didn't call each other on their varying conclusions, grappling with one another's facts and interpretations as Sarbanes and Specter started to do on the first day, for those following at home it was hard to tell who was right; among those watching from the floor, it was evidently a foregone conclusion that no one would change his mind. It was like spending hours watching two exquisitely trained prizefighters, back to back, shadow-boxing.

Hawks in flight

This absence of floor debate would seem less significant if every senator were absolutely convinced of his position, or if senators were vigorously trying to persuade one another out of the public's eye. But many senators on both sides did express grave doubts about their votes, and there were no friendly arguments taking place in smoke-filled rooms backstage.

Johnston wasn't the only senator to vote with the president while saying he preferred to rely on sanctions. James Jeffords and Al Gore expressed the same sentiment. Specter himself said, "Had I my preference, I would not have opted for a January 15 date, and I would have given sanctions more of an opportunity to work." Frank Murkowski, in explaining his decision to authorize using force, said he was not advocating abandoning sanctions: "For those who believe in the use of sanctions, as I do, the only responsible action to take now is to grant the president his request for a realistic threat of force." And a few of those who expressed confidence in their pro-force votes nevertheless put forth such lightweight arguments—Chuck Robb and Trent Lott come to mind—that one has to believe that, after a few minutes alone with Nunn, Pat Moynihan, or Bob Kerrey, they might have begun to see the light.

No less a GOP luminary than Bob Dole declared he was not trying to give Bush "a license to see how fast we can become engaged in armed conflict. . . . I want our president to understand this is not some hunting license, that this is to strengthen his hand for peace, not war but for peace." Later, he added, ". . . I think the bottom line is that this is not a blank check, as far as this senator is concerned. I intend to use my influence, if any, in every way that I can to find some peaceful way to resolve the current crisis. It just seems to me that we authorize, we do not mandate. We do not say that it has to be today, tomorrow, or next week." Of course, the bombs started falling four days later.

These men didn't sound like hawks. None of them seemed as committed to war as, we subsequently learned, George Bush had been for months. Is it so hard to imagine that a respectful heart-to-heart talk with a valued antiwar colleague might have swayed the three votes that would have meant continued sanctions rather than war?

Red badge or scarlet letter?

But in the modern Senate—with senators smothered by staff, wrapped up in fundraising, constantly on the move—such heart-to-hearts are rare events, even, evidently, when the issue is a declaration of war. In this case, the majority and minority leaders repeatedly made clear that they were treating each senator's decision as a "vote of conscience," to be cast free of all partisan pressure. There would be no vote counts, no arm-twisting. That seems right, although the White House did not act quite so nobly. What's much harder for an outsider to understand is why individual senators who strongly opposed war—who believed, as Nunn put it, that they would not "be able to look the parents, the wives, husbands, and children in the eye and say that their loved ones sacrificed their lives for a cause vital to the United States"—did not go door-to-door trying to help their peers recognize that desperate morality gap.

Senators did discuss how they were planning to vote and why, but no one tried to change anybody else's position. According to Senator Paul Wellstone, "If there was a concerted lobbying strategy, I didn't see it. I don't think it took place." Senator Jeffords says that in the days leading up to the vote, he got one call from the Mitchell-Nunn coalition. He can't remember who made it. An aide to Harry Reid of Nevada, one of the Democrats to vote with the president, recalls that his senator had one phone conversation with Mitchell, but they "left it up in the air, because he hadn't decided."

Senator Kent Conrad says that there were "intense discussions," but "I didn't see a single senator trying to persuade another senator—even senators who took a different view, I didn't see anyone questioning them or upbraiding them." An aide to Senator Charles Grassley, one of the Republicans to break with the president, says that "once he made public his position [on Thursday before the vote] he did not take calls from anyone or see anyone. . . . He felt it was a personal vote, and he wanted to avoid the influence of his colleagues." And to avoid influencing them, ap-

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parently. This was consistent with the Democratic leadership's approach. According to George Mitchell's press aide, Diane Dewhirst, Mitchell "would discuss [the issues] with other members of the Senate who were of a like mind." She then offers this cold comfort: "It was virtually the same discussion and debate as occurred on the Senate floor."

"I found that people just felt that this was such a critically important vote that they respected everyone else coming to a decision, even if it was a decision different from theirs," says Conrad, giving his version of the prevailing Capitol Hill explanation for this absence of influence. That sounds perfectly sensible . . . until you consider that, at least off the Hill, it's usually the reverse. That is, the more critically important the issue, the more fervently you're likely to try to persuade others to see things your way. But on today's Hill, issues are truly "critically important"—in the sense that just voting your conscience, instead of winning, isn't good enough—only if constituents' votes, a contributor's campaign donation, or one's own prestige is on the line.

In the end, the most striking thing about the antiwar antilobby is not how unusual it was, but how similar it was to that of the Senate doves 20 years ago. Even after American ground troops had been fighting and dying in Vietnam for five years, antiwar senators were still genteelly adhering to the decorum of the Senate, still making speeches instead of trying to make policy. Now once again the Senate doves have protested too little and acquiesced to war. Certainly a vote up or down on war and peace should be a matter of individual conscience. But it is a strange moral code that treats as a violation of conscience any efforts to save others from making, at the nation's expense, what you believe is a tragic mistake. □

The Washington Monthly JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR NOVEMBER 1990 IS PRESENTED TO:

Jeannie Kever

The San Antonio Light

A year ago, Levi Strauss & Co. closed a plant in San Antonio to take advantage of lower labor costs in Costa Rica—to most sophisticates, just one more case of a company sensibly cashing in on the global economy. Kever, in a five-part series beginning November 11, pushed past the comforting macroeconomics to show the costs of the closing for the workers and for the city. Cut loose in a sagging economy, many knowing no English or skills beyond sewing together "Dockers" pants, 1,115 workers turned to the state for help. Up to $10 million will eventually be spent on them in welfare benefits and vocational training—but for what? As of December, San Antonio's dysfunctional retraining system hadn't offered much in the way of new skills and had found jobs for only 14. Sure, Dockers may be cheaper—but, this series inescapably asks, what are the other implications for American society as more and more relatively well-paying, semiskilled jobs vanish overseas?

FOR DECEMBER 1990 IS PRESENTED TO:

Mike Wallace

"60 Minutes"

In a segment that aired December 2, Wallace punched holes in the Israeli government's version of the bloody events on Jerusalem's Temple Mount last October 8. A special commission concluded, in the words of Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that "Moslem fanatics, the supporters of Saddam Hussein" attacked Jewish worshippers at the foot of the Wailing Wall with "thousands of rocks . . . hurtled from great height." In fact, as dramatic footage helps demonstrate, there were no worshippers at the wall when the stones were thrown; the Palestinians were throwing at the police, not at worshippers; the police apparently attacked first, moving quickly from tear gas to rubber bullets to live ammunition; and the police fired indiscriminately, shooting even at ambulances trying to reach the wounded. Dozens of people, including three health workers, were hit, and 17 died.

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Nominations for stories published or aired in February will close March 15. The winner will be announced in the May issue.

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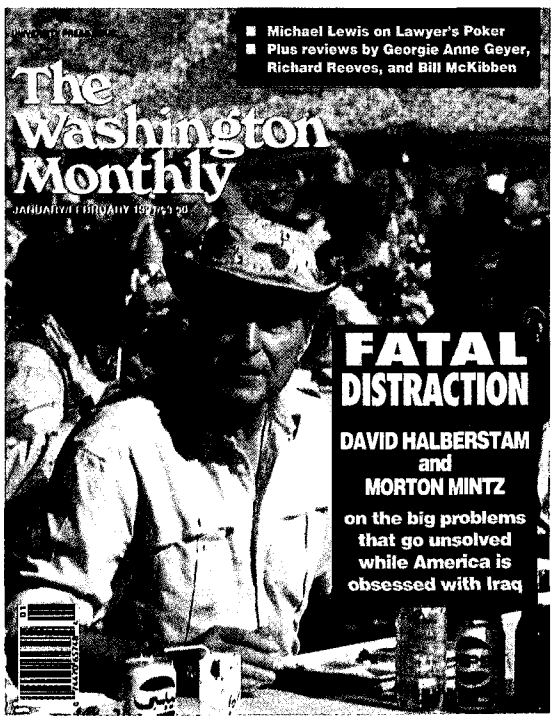
IF YOU'RE NOT AFRAID TO BE RIGHT TOO SOON



In the first months of the Gulf crisis, while most of the national media acted as cheerleaders for the U.S. military buildup, we were almost alone in asking why the Bush administration was repeating the costly mistakes of Vietnam—risking a ground war in Asia and allowing America's elite to avoid military service.

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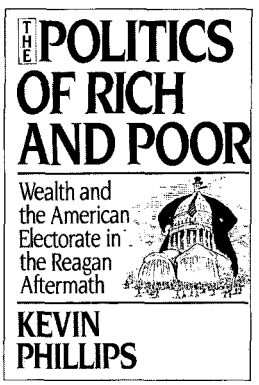

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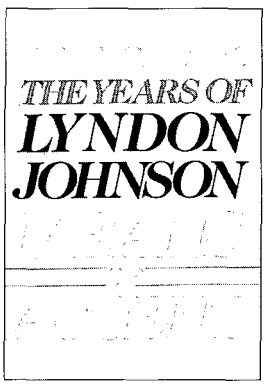

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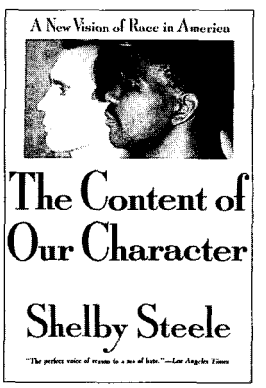

HONORABLE MENTION

Michael Barone
Our Country

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Daniel Patrick Moynihan
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Class Can't Be Dismissed

Before we can solve class problems, we have to recognize they exist

by James Fallows

What is good and brave about this book deserves notice, despite the parts that are exasperating and overdone.

DeMott's main argument is that class differences and class barriers are a central reality of American life—but that we find ways to pretend they don't exist, creating a class system that is even crueler and more demoralizing than it would otherwise be. When people discuss each others' backgrounds—"And where do your children go to school?" "We know them from 'the country' "—or even use terms like "preppie" or "bridge-and-tunnel crowd," they are, DeMott says, clearly talking about distinct American classes. But, as he devotes most of the book to demonstrating, our politics and pop culture make these look like some other kind of division—especially of taste and broad-mindedness. The "Living" section of *The New York Times* is in reality directed at those with the money to throw around on antiques and second homes, but it acts as if the audience were defined merely by good taste: Some people appreciate the Hamptons, some prefer mobile homes. When George Bush advertises the fact that he eats pork rinds and listens to Loretta Lynn, the message is that there really isn't any difference between this Andover-educated senator's son and the average working guy. Professional-class Americans imagine "rednecks" to be jingoistic and bigoted—after all, look who's doing most of the flag-waving and cheering at Support Our Troops rallies. DeMott says that the working class was forced into bearing the burden of the Vietnam war, and is giving a natural response: *"You call us working stiff types*, says the talkback

James Fallows is Washington editor of The Atlantic *and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

**The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Class.* Benjamin DeMott. *Morrow, $18.95.*

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message. *You chuckle at vulgar slobbish stupid macho jingos. But tell us this, draft boards and recruiters and admen: Who* made *the jingo? Who* made *the patriot into the man of hate?"*

Drowning in class

The strongest part of this analysis, I think, is DeMott's discussion of schools. Viewed coldly, the school system is obviously the main transmission belt of American class standing. Public schools are increasingly segregated by neighborhood, which means by income and class. Parents with money increasingly buy their way out of the public schools altogether. The more money your parents have, the more likely you are to go to a good high school—either a prep school or a fancy suburban campus—and then to college and professional school; the more college and professional training you get, the more money you are likely to make, so you can start your kids on the cycle again. At the same time, the school system is open *enough* and fair enough to create exceptions to this general pattern: the small-town kid at Harvard, the dropout who makes a fortune as an entrepreneur. As a result, the school system is viewed as a more-or-less fair competition that sorts Americans according to their effort and merit. (A pop culture illustration that appeared too recently to make it into DeMott's book is the cartoon series "The Simpsons." The bumbling father, Homer, is always pointing out that he's stuck in his terrible job because he never studied when he was at Springfield High. In one episode, when Homer thought he was about to die from food poisoning, he passed on to his son Bart the phrase that had stood him in best stead through his working life: "Good idea, boss!") Nearly 20 years ago, in their book *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb brilliantly described how this internalized sense of failure affected the noncollege class. DeMott portrays the awful smugness of people who succeed: "If, as a millionaire president in the White House put it, life is unfair, school wasn't. *I earned my edge, shaped my future, under the rule of fairness; the race that settled things was the same length for all."*

DeMott has dozens of other illustrations, culled from books, newspapers, movies, and TV, of the gap between the class-bound reality of daily life and the idea of classlessness. For example, Gary Gilmore, the Utah murderer, had been in jail when he should have been learning the unwritten rules of social intercourse. Therefore, when he got out of jail, he took seriously an employer's talk about "not treating me like a boss," and broke class taboos by showing up at the boss's house on Sunday morning to spend some time with his new pal. DeMott is (as best I know) the first person to point out in print that David Letterman's humor often boils down to mockery of working-class taste. The most wrenching anecdote in the book concerns a black student who had just enrolled at Amherst. He dove into the pool for the compulsory swimming test—and drowned; the school hadn't imagined that one of its students would never have learned how to swim.

The main defect of this book is a tone that is probably meant to be arch but which strikes me as pretentious and gassy. ("More than once in recent times the resulting state-administered class injustice has been not less than appalling in its human cost.") There is a certain built-in gracelessness to a university professor writing, from the Berkshires, that no one else sympathizes with the downtrodden quite as much as he. For better and worse the book is structured as pure "cultural commentary": little first-hand reporting, lots of set-piece essays on Bruce Springsteen or George Plimpton or Oliver North. And DeMott is so intent on demolishing the myth of classlessness that he tends to portray it as *totally* a myth, which distorts and omits the ways in which America can be an unusually mobile society. Still, the problem DeMott is writing about is (along with race, to which it is connected) our fundamental social disorder, and his book takes us a significant step closer to dealing with it. □

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Days of Whine and Poses

John Tower's lament—and what it misses

by Steven Waldman

John Tower still seems *a little* bitter. The media that covered his confirmation is described in his memoirs as a "lynch mob . . . waiting beside a rickety wooden tumbrel to take me off to the guillotine." Other accusers were "old political enemies . . . publicity seekers, crackpots, and busybodies." And Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee? Let's just say Tower shouldn't sit next to Nunn at the next Military-Industrial Complex Christmas party. Nunn is the man who "was piling up the kindling at my feet" before Tower was "burned at the stake." Tower can barely go a page without hissing at Nunn, using that same tone of voice the Wicked Witch of the West used as she was melting. Nunn was "blinded by ambition"; a coward who becomes "frightened" in political battle; a war-wimp whose military service "was limited to six months of active duty in the Coast Guard, teaching swimming and physical training"; and even a sourpuss. "There is no place for levity in Sam Nunn's office," writes Tower, not known himself as Senator Laugh-a-minute.

If you come to this book* having only a vague memory of Tower as that nasty little man with black-lacquered hair, you will leave with a clearer impression of his nastiness. John Tower is not easy to like, and his memoirs are filled with ugly bursts of hypocrisy. For example, he spends much time criticizing the media for basing stories on unsubstantiated rumors about his drinking—and then attacks James Exon for having "a reputation" as one of the "most excessive regular boozers in the Senate."

It hurts, therefore, to admit that as Tower angrily flails at various targets, he scores some impressive direct hits, particularly against the media and a few of his fellow senators. The

Steven Waldman is a Washington correspondent for Newsweek *and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

**Consequences: A Personal and Political Memoir*. John G. Tower. *Little, Brown, $22.95.*

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Tower nomination battle combined elements of several previous media controversies, including intoxicants (a la Judge Douglas Ginsburg); women (Gary Hart); the revolving door (Michael Deaver); and a politicized confirmation process (poor Robert Bork). Tower's book, an attempt at personal vindication and score-settling, is not exactly a dispassionate analysis of the shifting standards of ethics. But he makes some incisive points and provides a good vehicle for figuring out when the character cops busted down the door without a warrant and when they were being fair.

At the time of the nomination flap, critics of the media's "new morality" often decried the obsessive focus on "womanizing and drinking." But these two evils shouldn't be spoken of in the same breath. They are not remotely comparable in seriousness. "Womanizing" may or may not be a character issue that reflects upon treatment of other human beings. Drinking, on the other hand, is not a fuzzy character issue, but a fitness issue, much in the same way a candidate's stupidity might be. The frantic senatorial and media crusade to discover Tower's drinking history was entirely proper.

Still, the crusaders had to answer a difficult question: what kind of proof about drinking does one need? Tower's nomination was going well until Paul Weyrich, the right-wing activist, told the committee he had personally witnessed Tower in an unfortunate "condition—lacking sobriety." But the puritanical Weyrich wasn't deemed a reliable judge of such things. Nunn and Senator John Warner, the ranking Republican on the committee, began really paying attention to the drinking issue when Congressman Larry Combest, a former Tower staff aide, described his old boss's habits in the sixties and seventies. In the words of *The Washington Post*, Combest told the senators that Tower "consumed a bottle of scotch a night several times a week and . . . had to be helped out of his detachable shirt collars into bed." Tower disputes many of the particular incidents that various accusers mentioned, but does concede that he drank "too much" in the early seventies and later cut back.

For his defense, Tower and his allies adopted what could be called the Lampshade Standard. A public official's drinking habits are not relevant unless they noticeably affect his job performance in some blatant way—e.g., causing him to don a lampshade during a Senate debate on arms control. "He did his job; never showed up drunk on the Senate floor," one conservative told a Tower associate. Combest, realizing he had inadvertently hurt his friend, sought to clarify the issue by saying that he was "unaware of any instance when Senator Tower's judgment or ability to render reasonable and cogent decisions on matters of import was impaired owing to alcohol abuse or dependency." In other words, no drunkenness when it really mattered.

The problem with the job performance standard is that if Tower was an alcoholic he could have been stone sober during office hours and still had his judgment and temperament somewhat impaired by liquor. That's the nature of alcoholism. Chemical dependency on alcohol changes the functioning of the brain continuously, not just when a person is drunk. And just what exactly are the office hours at Defense during a war, anyway?

Nunn created a new standard for judging drinking. He looked for evidence not of whether drinking affected Tower's job performance but of whether Tower had been an alcoholic. Nunn concluded there had been "a pattern of the abuse in the seventies [that] made incidents in the eighties assume more significance." Then, the question became not, "Does Tower drink occasionally now," but, "Did Tower ever address his problem?" Nunn's conclusion: "I could find no point of where [the pattern] was recognized and dealt with, and that was all the way up to the late eighties." In other words, an alcoholic cannot cure himself by drinking a bit less; he has to stop and face his problem. So the fact that Tower continued to drink, even if not quite as much, was damning. Nunn may have developed this more inclusive—and sensible—standard merely as an excuse to get Tower, or he may have been influenced by something from his past: Tower notes that Nunn worked for several years on the staff of Senator Herman Talmadge without realizing that Talmadge was an alcoholic, perhaps convincing Nunn that the Lampshade Standard was unrealistic.

Altogether unreliable sources

But Tower has every right to fume over some of the other techniques used during his confirmation hearings. The most commonly misused standard in ethics debates is the "appearance of impropriety" test. In the discussions about the Keating Five, Tower, and other scandals, ostensibly scrupulous ethics monitors have said that a particular legislator's actions weren't improper per se but created the appearance of wrongdoing. "The perception is there," John Glenn said in arguing against Tower's nomination on the floor of the Senate. "The perception [of a drinking problem] is in the press. I cannot verify [it], but it is a perception that is out." Glenn's remarks were truly scurrilous because he repeated the charges without knowing whether they were true, simply on the grounds that some people thought they were. If this standard were applied against Glenn, a Keating Fiver, he would get censured for sure.

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The Senate Armed Services Committee added the "public confidence" corollary to the "appearance of impropriety" test. Bad appearance matters, quite aside from the truth, because it damages public respect. After investigating whether Tower gave defense contractors classified information he obtained while a U.S. arms control negotiator, the committee concluded: "The committee has no evidence that Senator Tower provided his clients with classified information. In the committee's judgment, however, this situation created the appearance of using public office for private gain and casts doubt on his ability to command public confidence in the integrity of the system." This argument is like a criminal court judge saying, "We have no proof that this man is a burglar, but the popular perception says that he is, so the public will lose faith in this court if we do not convict him."

The appearance test should be used only when misdeeds are so hard to prove that one must look at secondary evidence. After all, the appearance isn't wrong because it looks bad but because it is a reasonable indicator that something bad *actually* happened. A smoking gun isn't damning because smoke is dangerous but because it hints that a bullet was fired.

With good reason, Tower complains bitterly about the chain reaction that turns rumor into legitimate news. Time after time, someone made a charge, the FBI investigated it, and then the fact that the FBI was looking into it gave the charge credence—even if it was found to be untrue. Consider this report in the *Los Angeles Times*: "Tower, according to unsubstantiated stories, is a womanizer and has a drinking problem. The tales were inspired by Tower's recent divorce. One particularly wild—and wholly unfounded—story has Tower barred from Australia because of a drunken spree there." And *L.A. Times* editor Shelby Coffey's mother wears army boots, a wholly unreliable source once told me.

Having said all that, I must add: Boy, am I glad John Tower isn't defense secretary. Not because of "womanizing." And not primarily because of his drinking, which was troubling, but ultimately not conclusive enough to reject any nominee who was otherwise outstanding. The problem was that Tower was not otherwise outstanding—because of his relationship with the defense industry and his stewardship of the Senate Armed Services Committee during the Reagan defense build-up. There was no solid proof Tower did anything illegal when he was a defense consultant after leaving government, but his closeness to the industry makes it doubtful he would have been sufficiently critical of contractors' products and claims.

Looking back through the press coverage of the confirmation battle, it is staggering how little attention was given to Tower's role as chairman of the Armed Services Committee from 1981 to 1985, as the Pentagon and Congress squandered a trillion dollars. Here, the public was ill served by the media's predilection toward certain types of critical reporting and its avoidance of others. It vigorously pursues "character" issues—sometimes legitimate, sometimes not—because they're fun to write and read about. The press is also good at tracking down corruption because it involves the breaking of predefined rules. Since the rules were written by other people, the media doesn't have to judge their appropriateness, just whether they were violated. But when it comes to policy dereliction—remember the S&L crisis?—the press finds itself unequipped (who am I to say if a billion dollars should have been spent on that weapons system?), uninterested (covering policy means studying minutiae), or unwilling (no one ever won a Pulitzer for analyzing how a piece of legislation got screwed up).

Tower says he was a military reformer all along. I'm no defense expert, but one statement from his book casts serious doubt on his bona fides: "Waste, fraud, and abuse [in the Pentagon] wouldn't have amounted to even a billion dollars. . . . The money was spent well." Does he honestly believe that the Pentagon has wasted only .05 percent of its budget? The B-1 bomber alone is a waste of $20 billion.

Unwise and consent

Tower feels that an irrational, runaway process chewed him up, ignoring his defense expertise and past service to his country. What's more, "the rules of ethical conduct are constantly shifting with little or no warning"—and he ticks off the names of senators who drank a lot more than he did, believe you me.

Ethical standards *have* shifted, but mostly for the better. And while it may be true that the Senate was looking for any reason it could find not to confirm Tower, one must ask why it looked so hard. Given the inherent clubbiness of the Senate, members' zeal to jump on scraps of evidence leads one to conclude that Tower was a supremely unpopular fellow.

But the best explanation of why so many senators voted against Tower came from Senator Alan Dixon of Illinois, who told *Washingtonian* magazine that he could only see bucking Democratic party leadership "for someone who you really want in the job, because this is a biggie." For all the service Tower gave his country, there was *a lot* wrong with him as a nominee for defense secretary. The Constitution would be more helpful if, instead of having vague language about advise and consent, it said, "By a vote of two-thirds of its Members, Congress may inform a President, 'Aw, come on—you can do better than that!'" □

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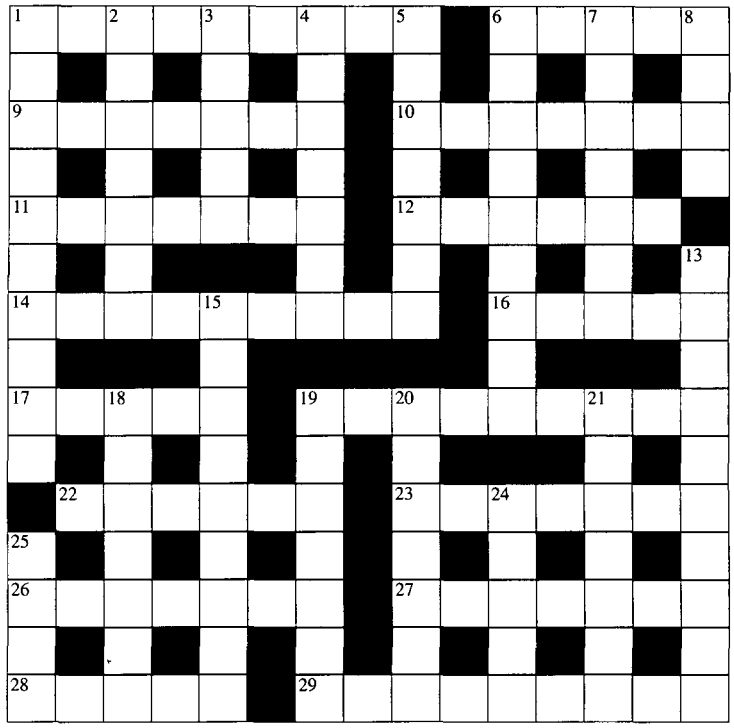
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



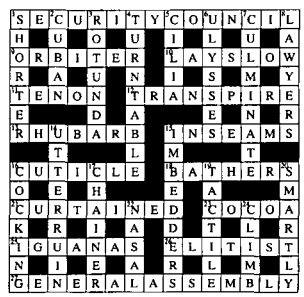
ACROSS

1. Georgian diplomacy? (9)
6. To meet with ably suggests permanence. (5)
9. TV show about Alps with ice coming back in. (7)
10. Province in a root directory. (7)
11. It is more arduous to make Len fuss. (4,3)
12. Where he heads away from here after tea . . . (6)
14. . . . and remaps carefully for the sign of the first. (9)
16. Four banks in the middle of a city. (5)
17. Dub in nicely for kind of suit. (5)
19. Knot mastered at midpoint of naval service? (4,5)
22. Like ruler seeking response. (6)
23. Everything in demonstration is superficial. (7)
26. Note a French question. (7)
27. Italian dish shows its root. (7)
28. Nudes cavorting in Saudi environment. (5)
29. 1 Across in the morning? (9)

DOWN

1. Classification of 1 Across? (4,6)
2. Frisky pet sups and comes to plate. (5,2)
3. Strip of rawhide following smell. (5)
4. Interchange point for insect in backward ski resort. (7)
5. To tend differently after killing start is difficult. (7)
6. Less valuable environment for 1 Across? (2,3,4)
7. Food remnant around bucking bronco. (7)
8. Place to which Othello, for example, returns. (4)
13. Guilty thing owner managed. (2,3,5)
15. Complexion of sunrise reflecting around center of puddle. (9)
18. Primitive supporter of 1 Across? (7)
19. Mixed eight in top half for London meal. (4,3)
20. Eve to Adam originally? (4,3)
21. Russian is on translation list, too. (7)
24. Church parts are passé in new order. (5)
25. Dice shaken for win that is assured. (4)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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Productivity with a Human Face

Long practiced in Japan, the management ideas of Edward Deming are finally starting to catch on here, too

by Michael Maccoby

Although Americans have long deplored other countries' rigid definitions of class, for 80 years our notion of industrial organization has been distinctly feudal. Under Taylorism, the reigning "assembly-line" model of corporate culture (named after Frederick Winslow Taylor, the founder of scientific management), front-line workers perform discrete, simple tasks that are coordinated and controlled by several strata of managers, all of whom answer to one big brain at the top—the CEO, king of the corporate machine. While Taylorism contains some striking inequities—great wealth for the few; low-tech, repetitive jobs for the many—it nevertheless fits a world of mass production of simple products made with basic tools. Unfortunately, the system has outlasted its context. A revolution is currently taking place in the field of management; the outcome will determine the competitiveness of American industry.

A more complex world of constantly changing products and services requires highly motivated employees who want to work together to satisfy customer needs. That's a tall order, certainly, but the industrial model already exists. It does not do away with hierarchy, but replaces the megamachine with a humanistic social system. Managers are responsible for rooting out poor quality and improving systems so that workers can do a better job. Managers become coaches, encouraging all members to constantly improve. Workers are well trained and motivated by pride. Cooperation rather than competition dominates relations within the company and even, to a degree, between competitors. If this new corporate culture sounds soft and idealistic, consider this: it has galvanized Japanese business for more than 40 years.

This philosophy is Demingism, and its 90-

Michael Maccoby is a visiting senior scholar of the Center for Science and International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

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year-old creator, W. Edward Deming, is Iowa-, not Tokyo-born. In his own country, Demingism is just now catching on in management science—a fact that explains the simultaneous appearance of three new books* on his ideas and his life. The most lively, *The Man Who Discovered Quality* by Andrea Gabor, describes Deming's exploits in Japan and provides inside knowledge about how American companies like Ford, GM, and Xerox grapple with the new philosophy. The chapter on Xerox (called "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back") shows how hard it is for even the best-managed American companies to maintain advances in quality. Mary Walton's *Deming Management at Work* is a more straightforward report on companies and government agencies that have applied Demingism, with significant success. Rafael Aguayo's *Dr. Deming: The American Who Taught the Japanese About Quality* simply outlines Deming's 14 points for the transformation of management, adding little that cannot be found in the other two books.

Deming, with faint praise

Trained in mathematical physics at Yale, Deming first saw the managerial relevance of his ideas at Bell Labs, where he examined the causes of variation in quality in order to improve manufacturing systems. Yet, unlike many mathematicians, he was acutely aware that work systems have human as well as technical parts. So he trained managers and engineers to address the human factor, too, exposing superficial reasoning and faulty logic and making qualitative improvements in the way a company runs.

While American companies hardly noticed Deming's innovations, in 1949 he was invited to Japan by industrial leaders to lecture on quality. From then on, the invitations kept coming. So integral was Deming to Japan's resurgence as an industrial power that the country's highest national award for quality is called the Deming Prize. (This prize is the model for the Baldridge Award, recently established by Congress, for which practically all major American companies now compete.)

Deming was not alone in leading the quality revolution. Americans Joseph Juran, Armand Feigenbaum, and Homer Sarasohn also lectured to the Japanese on the subject. Faiichi Ohno created the Toyota system of small-lot production and just-in-time inventory control, and Kaoru Ishikawa developed quality circles and worker participation in a Total Quality Control (TQC) system. But it is Deming who made the most impact on the Japanese—and on those select Americans who now understand what intrigued the East 40 years ago.

Managers are seldom indifferent to Deming, for his is a demanding religion—a fact Gabor illustrates particularly well. "By the late eighties," she writes, "the Deming Prize competition began to come under fire by some Japanese who viewed its do-or-die approach to both competition and TQC as a distortion, and sometimes even a liability. . . . Some executives contend that even competing for the Deming Prize can sometimes be unproductive. For example, Shimizu Construction, which won the Deming Prize in 1983, spent so much time and effort chasing it that the same year its financial results showed a clear drop from the year before. 'The fervor shown by proponents of Total Quality Control is exactly like that seen in adherents of some religious cult,' says one company executive."

Most American companies are a long way from such fanaticism; they still believe that global competitiveness will be maintained by low labor costs, a cheap dollar, and protectionist policies. A few years ago, as a member of a National Academy of Engineering committee on the international competitiveness of the U.S. construction industry, I heard complaints about high American wages and lack of government support. Yet a member of the committee, a vice president of IBM, reported that Shimizu had won a contract to construct a new solid state lab, beating out American competitors, including Bechtel. The winning advantage was not in wage differentials or government help. It was in quality and competence.

What keeps American companies from getting the message? Part of the answer lies in the cases reported by Gabor and Walton. Demingism requires hands-on leadership from the top: Don Peterson of Ford, John Hudiberg of Florida Power and Light, Thomas Frist Jr. of Hospital Corporation of America. If we view corporations as social systems and recognize that everyone must be involved in the quality revolution, it is necessary for leaders to create an environment where people want to change. While Gabor mentions the participation of the United Auto Workers in change at Ford and GM, she tells us little about the union's key role. Walton does not even note that Florida Power and Light first ignored the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in implementing quality changes—but later found that the union's support was crucial to improvement.

Walton reports Deming's notion of the seven deadly diseases that weaken American industry and short-circuit the quality revolution. These include a short-term focus emphasizing the quarterly dividend,

**The Man Who Discovered Quality: How W. Edward Deming Brought the Quality Revolution to America.* Andrea Gabor. *Random House, $21.95. Deming Management at Work.* Mary Walton. *Putnam, $21.95. Dr. Deming: The American Who Taught the Japanese About Quality.* Rafael Aguayo. *Lyle Stewart, $19.95.*

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management mobility, lack of deep knowledge of the business, and lack of loyalty to the company. He has particular contempt for managers who "hope for instant pudding"—quick-fix formulas or ready-made examples—instead of mapping their company's unique route to quality. (Interestingly, Deming also condemns the excessive costs of employee health care and warranties—expenses he blames on lawyers who work on contingency.)

After so many years at the front lines of the revolution, Deming has become not just a management scientist, but an adept psychologist as well. He believes that the American love of individualistic competition undermines cooperation within companies, among companies, and with suppliers. An addiction to winning, fed by grading systems at school and work, leaves many "losing" Americans humiliated and unmotivated to learn. Not even the best quality methods and statistical techniques will produce the desired results unless people are free from fear and respected for their contributions to continuous improvement. Deming would do away with performance evaluations and merit ratings altogether—in fact, he's already done that in several sections of GM, replacing the ratings with a system of coaching and mutual support.

Both Gabor and Walton paint a credible picture of Deming's visionary corporate structure. But neither gives us a full sense of Deming's forcefulness as an innovator and management prophet. Deming's vision is not only of new management systems, but of a different *spirit* for American industry. He recently said to me: "People are entitled to have fun, to have joy in learning and work. Even when work is drudgery, as it sometimes must be, people need to see the importance of it and have a sense of a positive future."

"People are entitled to self-esteem," he added. "Our system crushes it out." □

MEMO OF THE MONTH

November 7, 1990

TO: All Staff

FROM: JJL

RE: Staff Policy

Our new staff policy is going to be to do as much as we can instead of as little as we can.

11/07/90 14:58 CONG J LAFALCE BUFFALO OFF 001

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Public affairs books scheduled to be published this month.

The Big Three: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin in Peace and War. Robin Edmonds. *Norton, $24.95.* One of the seldom-noted consequences of the turbulent period through which we are now passing is its effect on historiography. During the half-century of the Cold War, studies of World War II were in vogue. Historians and readers seeking to understand the origins of the great American-Soviet confrontation looked for answers in Churchill's efforts to maintain the British empire, Stalin's frustrations as he waited for the opening of a second front, Roosevelt's confidence that his powers of persuasion would, in the end, bring the Soviets into line. The Cold War's finale might have made these questions seem more remote and antique, pushing them from the realm of current politics into that of abstract historical debate.

Historians of World War II have been saved from this fate by the events of 1990 and 1991. As the nations of the world grope for new alignments and as the UN coalition tries to tame the dictator described by President Bush as "Hitler revisited," the statecraft of World War II offers important precedents and lessons. How early must force be used to contain a regional power with world ambitions? How can we avoid miscalculation and misperception? To what degree should agreements between governments be concealed from the peoples of the world? How wise is a policy of unconditional surrender? To what extent is the strategy of a war fought by coalition shaped by the postwar aspirations of the coalition members? Can international organizations take the place of traditional balance-of-power politics?

An additional gain for historians of World War II is the opening of archives in the Soviet Union. James MacGregor Burns once considered following his *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* with a book called *Big Three*, but gave up after realizing the degree to which access to Soviet archives was restricted. Joseph P. Lash also sought to write a book on the subject, a successor volume to his *Roosevelt and Churchill.* With Franklin Roosevelt Jr. in tow, he went to Moscow and vainly sought to persuade officials of the Brezhnev regime to let him use the archives and interview surviving officials of the war. They refused, and he gave up the project. Now, presuming that *glasnost* survives the new Soviet retrenchment from reform, Western and Soviet scholars have the chance to rewrite much of the history of World War II.

In light of all of this, one approaches Robin Edmonds's *The Big Three* with high expectations of dramatic new information and analysis. Alas, these expectations go largely unfulfilled. A former British diplomat and author of a history of Anglo-American relations from 1945 to 1959, Edmonds has done a thorough job of searching American, British, and Soviet sources as well as consulting scholars in all three countries. But he offers little that we did not know before.

This is not helped by a writing style that seems more suited for the minute books of the British Foreign Office than narrative history. Latin quotations, decorative references to Shakespeare, Bacon, and "Ariadne's thread," and pedestrian observations such as "Roosevelt was a handsome man" tend to thrust the author between the reader and the events described, too often giving the volume the sound of a historian chatting about what happened, rather than letting the events and analysis themselves take center stage.

These shortcomings are all the more notable because of the brevity of this book. Even the most deft essayist would have a difficult time writing a central source on the Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin relationship within the confines of 405 pages. Especially since Edmonds spends his first 175 pages on the eight years preceding the alliance, his treatment of this major historical subject winds up being synoptic and unstartling. Edmonds lauds the allies for remaining united, defeating Hitler, and creating the UN, and faults them for leaving the issues of Germany and the role of nuclear

"Not only a masterful analysis of the current situation in South Africa, but, far more importantly, it makes direct suggestions that might well shape the outcome of discussions in South Africa regarding the country's future."
—Leroy Vail, editor of *The Creation of Tribalism in South Africa*
"Horowitz's penetrating CAT scan of the South African conflict clearly reveals both deep lesions and unsuspected capacities for healing."—Peter H. Schuck, Yale Law School

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weapons unresolved. The need remains for a large, analytical history of the "Big Three": their impact on their times and our own.

—*Michael R. Beschloss*

The End of Laissez-Faire: National Purpose and the Global Economy After the Cold War. Robert Kuttner. *Knopf, $22.95.* **Quicksilver Capital: How the Rapid Movement of Wealth Has Changed the World.** Richard B. McKenzie, Dwight R. Lee. *Free Press, $22.95.* You may have heard that Americans have forsaken laissez-faire economics. It happened when Alexander Hamilton became secretary of the treasury and announced that the government's job was to protect and nurture American manufacturers. Free markets? Adam Smith? Not in the land of the free and the home of the subsidy.

Pure laissez-faire—economic activity untouched by political meddling—has never existed and never will. The question, rather, is how much government meddling, and of what kind. Here are two new books arguing about both questions. One propounds what it calls the "New View": Government management of the economy is a good idea and is becoming inevitable anyway. No, the other book replies, government interventionism is a bad idea and is becoming impossible anyway.

Thus the two poles of the emerging debate about the post-Reagan economic era: Laissez-faire is dead; long live laissez-faire.

Which of these is really a new view? Maybe not the one that claims to be. In *The End of Laissez-Faire*, economics writer Robert Kuttner makes the case for giving up laissez-faire ideals and embracing "a politics of planning." Condensed, it goes like this:

Private individuals and companies make economic decisions which may not be, and often actually aren't, in the national interest. In practice, the government meddles in markets anyway—but it meddles irrationally, through patchwork programs and ad hoc protectionism. The truth is that free-market ideals served the U.S. well when we were the dominant economy, but now laissez-faire is a "false idol." We Americans ought to do as our canny European and Asian competitors do, and use a rational mixture of free markets and strategic planning to shore up our economic strength.

If you think you've heard this before, you have. Many times. The strength of Kuttner's book is the clarity with which he makes the case (and, I should add, his devastating attack on bizarre U.S. export controls). What the book makes clear, however, is that the New View has yet to advance too far.

Let's take it as a given that American policymakers' devotion to free-market principles has allowed U.S. businesses to make serious mistakes and to act in ways that conflict with American strategic interests. But what's the alternative?

It's all very well to talk about intelligent economic management by strategic-minded government officials. But how are you going to *do* it? In the first place, if you're going to protect and nurture key industries and technologies, you have to figure out which ones they are. Kuttner argues that our attachment to free-market ideals forces us to tinker with markets covertly and irrationally. "Orthodox American opinion," he says, "has no good criteria for sorting out good interventions from bad ones." True enough—that's why orthodox opinion argues that we should try to avoid intervening.

Kuttner himself offers no solution to this critical problem of finding "good criteria" for intervention. The closest he comes is this: We should turn to managed trade for "those products where nations are currently restraining trade and for one reason or another wish to retain or develop technological and production capacity." This is not, in my opinion, a "good criterion" for intervention; it's carte blanche for greedy protectionists.

There's more. As Kuttner himself admirably explains, you'd need a different kind of multinational management regime for each kind of industry—since no two are alike, there's no template. What a mess! And once everyone has agreed on "rational" industrial policies and managed-trade deals, how could you make adjustments without recourse to endless renegotiation and a zillion lawyers?

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And once you've decided to help out a declining industry or subsidize a rising one, when, if ever, do you pull the plug? And—most seriously of all—how do you separate the economically important industries from the politically powerful ones? How do you keep economic management from turning into a barrel of pork for rich companies with high-paid lobbyists?

The questions, none of them new, go on and on. Kuttner fails to answer them. He fails, for the most part, to even address them. The New View has been around now for a decade or more. It is fast becoming an old view. I'll keep listening, but I suspect that if the New Viewers haven't made it to first base by now, they're not likely to get there.

To jump from Kuttner's book to *Quicksilver Capital*, by economists Richard B. McKenzie and Dwight R. Lee, is to cross the Great Divide of economic policy. (Full disclosure: I am acknowledged in *Quicksilver Capital* because an article of mine inadvertently supplied its title.) In the West, two social systems contend for sovereignty: national electorates and international markets. Kuttner is an economic nationalist because he wants to protect the sovereignty of the electorate against the growing power of markets. McKenzie and Lee, being free-marketeers, take the opposite side: They prefer markets to politicians. Planning would "only ensure America's economic decline."

What makes their book important, however, is that it goes beyond merely deploring interventionism: It says that interventionism *is becoming impossible*. Like it or not, government power—*all* governments' power—is seeping away. Why are countries and political parties all over the world embracing market-oriented reforms? Not because politicians love markets, McKenzie and Lee say. The reason is that mobile capital is giving them no choice.

"Capital" means, of course, factories and machines, which corporations are now able to put anywhere in the world. But "capital" also means computing power, which is being relentlessly miniaturized and personalized. It means information, which is as mobile as the electrons in your telephone wire. (One typical fact from the authors' blizzard: the number of international phone calls placed from the U.S. rose from about 3 million in 1960 to 200 million in 1980 to 478 million in 1986.) It means talent and "brainwork," which can hop borders easily by plane and fax. And, of course, "capital" means money, which now zips around the world literally at lightning speed.

This means that, increasingly, producers or investors or skill-holders who are annoyed by high taxes or activist governments can simply leave. "As a consequence, governments have lost much of the monopoly power that undergirded their growth in earlier decades." Moreover, this process accelerates as technology continues linking people and economies; expanding global competition puts ever-tighter constraints on national governments.

It is not only the U.S. government that faces this problem. Last year, we were presented with a heartwarming spectacle: Japan's Ministry of Finance was humiliated. The ministry's bureaucrats, who are used to believing that they run their country, tried to keep the Japanese stock market from falling—and found out, to their chagrin, that they couldn't. Market forces had grown too big for them.

Even Washington is becoming aware of what's going on. The One Big Idea behind the "New Paradigm" movement that is so much the rage right now is this: In the (buzzword) "information age," a government of centralized 1940s-style bureaucracies and one-size-fits-all programs simply cannot work. Unless governments (more buzzwords) "compete" and become "entrepreneurial," they will ossify and collapse.

In short, the age of centralization is ending. No book I have seen has made that case as compellingly or as exhaustively as this one. It ought to be grappled with by anyone interested in the future of government. Less compelling are the authors' predictions of a dawning Golden Age of laissez-faire: Government economic power will be constrained, the private sector will take over more and more formerly public functions, special interests will lose power, drugs will be legalized, immigration will be liberalized, trade will become more open, schools will be privatized, and—need one add?—the capital-gains tax will be cut.

Maybe, maybe not. Economists always underestimate the power of political passion to overwhelm economic interest. Frighteningly, the movement toward a single world economy is being accompanied by a worldwide political movement toward ethnic nationalism and tribal separatism. When McKenzie and Lee put their pens down, the USSR was shining with the hope of perestroika. Now the USSR seems headed for war or dictatorship, and either is the deadly enemy of limited government and unfettered exchange.

A year ago I would have agreed with McKenzie and Lee that military power will lose much of its usefulness in a world of economic integration and flighty capital. I remember asking myself optimistically: Would an escalating international conflagration like World War I be at all likely, or even possible, in the age of the One World Economy? Now, by return mail from Iraq, comes the answer: Yes.

—*Jonathan Rauch*

The New York Times Book of Science Literacy: What Everyone Needs to Know from Newton to the Knuckleball. Richard Flaste, ed. *MacMillan, $24.95*. **Science Matters: Achieving Scientific Literacy**. Robert Hazen, James Trefil. *Doubleday, $19.95*. These two volumes join the recent wave of "literacy" books based on the marketing premise that Americans now emerge from school knowing nothing whatsoever.

Most literacy books are the reading equivalent of grazing menus. They contain lots of interesting snippets, brief encapsulations, lists, and so on, all suitable for contemporary short attention spans. *The New York Times Book of Science Literacy*, written by 21 staffers from the paper's excellent "Science Times" Tuesday section and put together by former "Science Times" editor Richard Flaste, follows this formula. The book is lively and enjoyable, rich in sharp details and clever touches. (One little box asks, "Why don't people who take nitroglycerin for a heart condition explode?") Readers can pretty much dive in anywhere in the volume and skip around at will.

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The latter quality, while making for low-input reading, also points to the volume's shortcoming—no controlling thread having to do with science literacy. You'd think a book with a title such as this would begin with a review of basic principles of natural law and the nature of scientific inquiry, and gradually build to advanced notions. Instead we dive right in with five pages on Newton's *Principia*, then leap immediately to four pages on gravity waves, a speculative concept from astrophysics that makes for entertaining ruminations, but which is pretty far afield from "what everyone needs to know" about science. Apparently this book is a compendium of recent interesting "Science Times" articles—a remix, as a record producer would say.

Science Matters by Robert Hazen and James Trefil is, on the other hand, an actual guide to science literacy. Hazen is a research scientist at Virginia's George Mason University, and Trefil is a professor of physics there; both have written books on science before. Trefil was a coauthor of *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, one of the volumes that initiated the literacy-book boomlet. Trefil can also be heard as a commentator on National Public Radio; he is, for my money, the best and most original legitimate scientist with a public voice today, as insightful as Carl Sagan or Stephen Jay Gould, but without the affected image of the former or the grating egotism of the latter.

Hazen and Trefil's book is the one that someone longing for a basic grasp of science ought to buy. It begins with a clear explanation of the framework by which science attempts to fathom the natural world, then builds to thoughtful yet simple explanations of the principal theories and findings of the major disciplines. The text is ordered and accessible, never daunting, never jumping ahead of itself: a product of the book having been composed by two authors instead of 21. And while *Science Matters* lacks the rich reporting details of *The New York Times Book of Science Literacy*, the volume compensates by delivering what it promises. If you've always thought you could never understand science, Hazen and Trefil will show you you're wrong.

—*Gregg Easterbrook*

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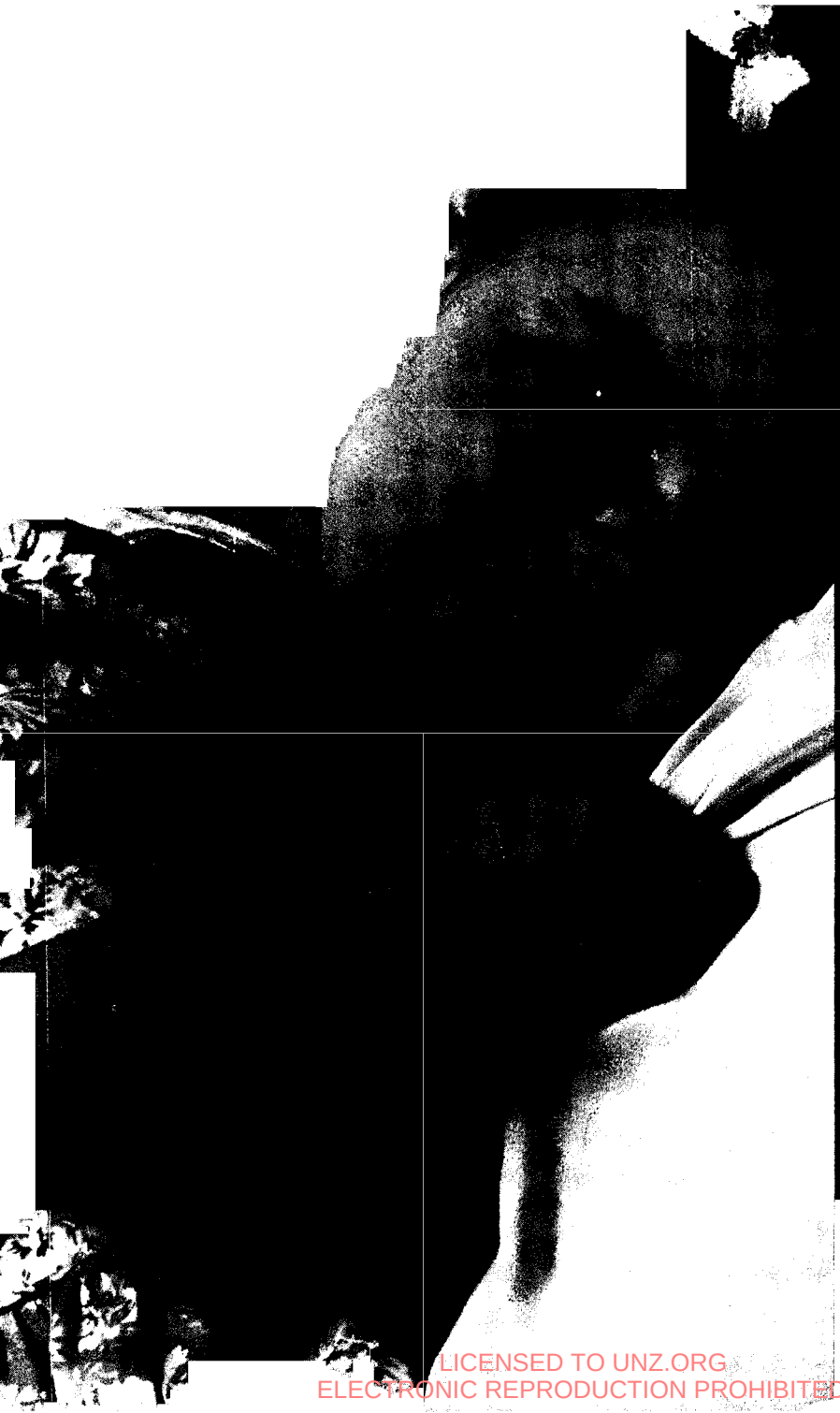

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